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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE SENATOR'S PLOT

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THE SENATOR'S PLOT;

OR,

Nick Carter's Youngest Client.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A SECRET CAUSE.

Nick Carter leaned back in his chair, and, having relighted his cigar, which had gone out, smiled across the table at the man who was with him in his study.

"All right, chief," he said, for his guest was the chief of the secret service of the government, who had called upon him that morning by appointment; "let me see if I have got your first statement correctly. Paul Brennan is the real name of the man you want. He is about thirty years old, educated, accomplished, refined in manner if he cares to have it appear so, handsome"—he glanced at some penciled notes he held in his hand, and read, half-aloud: "Tall, dark, lithe, and graceful, waving brown hair, brown eyes, acquiline nose, rounded chin, perfect teeth, smiles rarely but is wonderfully winning when he does so; has small hands and feet; scar of the size of a pea, round and white, between second and third knuckles of left hand; is always well dressed and neat in appearance. Is inclined to speak with a drawl, but is a perfect mimic and can imitate almost any accent or colloquialism with ease. Born in Montana and passed his youth as a cow-puncher."

The detective returned the slip of paper to his pocket.

"That is all right, so far as the description is concerned," said the chief. "That describes the man about as perfectly as it could be done, Nick. But the great difficulty about nailing the man is that while he cannot be said to disguise himself, as the word is generally understood, he has the ability to so change his appearance that—well, he is not likely to answer very closely to any description."

"And I suppose he has as many aliases as he has changes in appearance; eh?"

"Naturally; although we have no record of other names he has used. His old pals used to call him 'Handsome' sometimes, but he didn't like the name, and it was dropped."

"And he is wanted—for what?"

"Technically for uttering counterfeit money."

The detective smiled, blew a cloud of smoke into the air, was silent a moment, and said:

"You replied to that question rather oddly, chief."

Mr. W. shrugged his shoulders, smiled back at the detective, and replied:

"Nick, you know as well as I do that my department of the government is not supposed to do detective work outside the treasury department. If the state, war, or navy department happens to want one of my men, I have to discharge him from the service before he can take up the other work. The instant he is discharged by me, he is hired by the department that happens to want him. The instant his work there is done, he returns to me reengaged. That is a method we have for getting around the red tape."

"I know all about that, chief."

"Certainly. I refer to it only so that you will understand the present case the better; so that you will know why I have come to you to find Brennan for me."

"All right."

"Brennan has uttered counterfeit money; he has laid himself liable to arrest by the treasury department, but I doubt if there is sufficient evidence to convict him if he is caught. If there were nothing else against him than what we know about that part of his career, I would not waste the time and energy of one of my men, to chase him. The whole truth of the matter is this: We want the *man*. We want to get him under the cover of a *government* arrest. The charge against him *must* be a technical one. The *real* reason *must not* appear."

"That is precisely what I was beginning to think, chief. I must ask you to reply to a few questions for me before I accept the case."

"Well?"

"Who is the man behind this affair? Who is the individual who desires this arrest, on a technical charge?"

"He is a prominent government official."

"I guessed that much. Who is he?"

"My directions are that I may not reveal his name."

"I already had that idea, chief. I am rather surprised, though, that you should have come to me with the case; you should have known beforehand that I would not take it."

"But, don't you see, Nick, there is a technical charge? The government does want the man."

"All the same, chief, I won't take your case, or any other case, unless I know *all* about it. I must know the whole story from beginning to end. I won't work in the dark for anybody."

"But you don't see the point, Nick."

"Yes, I do; perfectly. It is you who do not see the point. Chief, you knew very well, before you came here this morning, that I would not take the case unless you told me *all* about it. Why do you try to work your bluff on me? You must have known that it would be utterly useless."

"Oh, well——"

"Shall we change the subject, or do you prefer to tell me *all* about it?"

The chief helped himself to a fresh cigar before he replied; then he said, slowly:

"You know very well, Nick, that it is because of no reluctance on my part that I have seemed to hesitate about telling you all about the case, don't you?"

"Assuredly."

"I think it is only right that I should relate the preliminary facts to you before going into the case itself."

"Take your own method and your own time, chief. I am entirely indifferent about it. If it were any one but you, I should refuse to hear the case at all, now. You know that."

"Yes."

"But in your case I know that you have come to me because you want me very badly; I know that you are always ready to help me out when I want assistance from your department; and I understand that you knew before you came here that I would not take the case unless you told me all the facts. Your present conduct in the matter is merely to keep a promise you have made to somebody that you would not tell me about it, unless you discovered after talking with me that it was absolutely necessary to do so."

"That is the truth, Nick," was the smiling reply.

"Further, I will wager that you told your principal before you came here that you would have to tell me the whole truth."

"Correct again."

"And that he made you promise him that you would put it off as long as you could."

"Right."

"So now, if you don't mind, we will consider that you have exhausted every resource in your power."

"First, Nick, before I go ahead with what I have to tell you, are you willing, after you are told the truth about the man, to make it appear that you are seeking him only on account of the counterfeit business?"

"I see no reason why not, if it is the truth that he has done such a thing."

"There is no doubt about that."

"Very well, then."

"Are you also willing to make him believe, when you come up with him, that it is the counterfeit business you are following up?"

"I see no reason to do otherwise, unless he is shrewd enough to guess the real purpose in seeking him; in which case I must have power to use my discretion in the matter."

"Of course."

"Then let it go at that."

"First, then, you must understand that I have never seen Brennan. I never happened to run across him."

"The description you have given me is second-hand, then."

"Yes; but I have no doubt that it is a good one."

"I wonder if you have any idea where I am to look for the man, chief?"

"Only a very vague one."

"Well, give me that."

"The senator—it is a senator who is the principal in this matter—is of the opinion that Brennan has gone back to his old haunts; he has an idea that Brennan would be likely to settle in the vicinity of his old exploits, when he was a youth."

"In Montana?"

"Anywhere between Texas and the Canada line where there are grazing-lands. Not necessarily in Montana. You see, the senator used to be a great cattle-owner himself. He owned the first of the great ranches in the Southwest, and later he owned larger holdings in the Northwest. Since the event happened which is the reason for my presence here this morning, he has either sold out his holdings, or he has organized what he did have, into companies, in which he personally does not prominently appear."

"I'm on; go on."

"So he is of the opinion that Brennan would now be found somewhere between the Canada line and Texas; possibly in Montana or Wyoming, but more likely, he thinks, in New Mexico or Arizona."

"I see."

"At least, the senator is reasonably positive that Brennan's friends out there, some of them, will know where he is now. It is the only clue to a trail that he can give us. He is willing to pay any price that is asked for the work, but he is in a great hurry to have it accomplished. In a word, he wants you to take the case and find your man, and close it all up inside of three months, if it can be done."

"Suppose it can't be done within that time? What, then?"

"Then the whole affair will be useless."

"If it can be done at all, three months should be amply sufficient, it seems to me."

"That is what I told him. I said to him that if Nick Carter couldn't do it inside of the three months, nobody could."

"Thank you. I don't suppose you intended it exactly as a compliment, however."

"No."

"All this talk, chief, makes one think that there is a woman in the case."

"There is, Nick."

"And that is the real reason for all the secrecy, eh?"

"Yes."

"And the woman is some relation to the senator?"

"She is his daughter."

"Oh; I see."

"She is also Paul Brennan's wife—a slight detail with which the senator himself was not familiar until very lately."

"Oho! I begin to understand. Now, hadn't you better tell me the story?"

"Yes. I am ready."

CHAPTER II.

A COW-PUNCHER'S ROMANCE.

"Five years ago," began the chief, settling himself in his chair, "the senator, whose name I will give you presently, took his wife and the two younger children abroad, as soon as congress adjourned. The oldest daughter, whose health was not considered robust at the time, was left at the ranch in New Mexico. She had with her a governess and a young woman companion to keep her company. The senator's daughter was eighteen at that time."

"Five years ago. She is twenty three now."

"Yes."

"Well?"

"The senator and his wife with the younger children remained abroad together until it was time for congress to convene at Washington again, when he returned alone. He left his wife and the children in Europe, and it may as well be said right here that they remained there the better part of two years."

"So, the eldest daughter—by the way, what is her given name?"

"Eugenie; she is called Gene, by her intimates."

"Well, then, Gene was left on the ranch in the West all that time?"

"Literally, yes. When the senator returned to Washington without his wife and the younger children, he sent for her to join him there, but she wrote that she was having such a good time, that her health was so greatly improved and that she liked the outdoor life so well that she preferred to stay where she was. The senator was not averse to having Washington to himself for the season, and he consented."

"Without even going to see his daughter?"

"So it would appear."

"Didn't he see her at all during the two years?"

"I believe not. He seemed surprised himself when he realized that it was so; but he is and was a busy man; he heard from his daughter every week."

"I think I understand," said the detective, nodding. "The gist of the thing is in the fact that the daughter Gene was left mistress of her own conduct for all that time; about two years."

"Exactly."

"And, therefore, the real reason why the outdoor life and the air were doing her so much good and why she preferred New Mexico to Washington, was because your handsome Paul Brennan was there, in the capacity of cow-puncher, or something of the sort."

"That is the idea; yes."

"Go on."

"My story must be somewhat disconnected right at this point."

"Tell it as it suits you best to do so, chief."

"I must jump now to the time when Gene's mother returned from Europe with the kids, and, of course went directly for her eldest daughter after that young woman had signified her intention of remaining even longer at the ranch."

The detective nodded.

"She informed her father and mother that she infinitely preferred New Mexico to Washington City. Several letters, some of them pleading and others peremptory, had no effect upon her and so finally the mother went out there. Of course the daughter was delighted to see her mother, and all that; but she was still obdurate about her proposed departure from the place."

"Where was the handsome cow-puncher all this time?"

"Let me get to that in my own way, Nick."

"All right."

"He really does not appear in the story yet."

"No? It strikes me that he has appeared and disappeared—both."

"Well, I haven't got to him as yet."

"Go ahead, then."

"The mother couldn't move the daughter. Coaxings had no effect upon her. Threats of this or that result of her obstinacy fell off her like water off a duck's back. Then the senator, becoming impatient, showed up. The result of it was that the daughter was persuaded to go East with her parents for a month, on the promise that she could return to the ranch after that time. But the senator was long-headed."

"Wait a moment. Did nobody tumble to what sort of a nigger there was in the fence?"

"Nobody had the remotest idea about it."

"Wasn't there anybody at the ranch to put a flea in the senator's ear?"

"Apparently not. At least nobody did so."

"Go on."

"Here is where the senator's long-headedness came into play. He hasn't been a politician all these years for nothing. No sooner was his daughter back at Washington, than he organized a cattle company and sold out all his ranch holdings to the company. Of course he still retained control, and practically owned his properties as much as he ever had, but he could with truth tell his daughter that he had sold out."

"So when the month was up——"

"When the time came for her to return there, he told his daughter that he had sold the ranch; that other people had taken possession, and that it was no longer a place where she could go."

"Hadn't he caught onto the fact, yet, that Gene was interested in one of the cow-punchers out there?"

"He had *guessed* that such might be the case, but all the inquiries he could make did not suggest to him *who* the man might be, and it never occurred to him that it was anything more than a flirtation."

"I see."

"But he was resolved to clean out the entire outfit, nevertheless, so as soon as the company was formed, he fired the whole bunch of cow-punchers from Eighty-three, which is the name of that particular brand, and he saw to it that not one of the men he had employed could get another job in that locality."

"It strikes me that he was driving the fellow *to* the girl, instead of away from her. He should have kept him at the ranch."

"He did not look far enough ahead to do that."

"Go on with the yarn."

"Well, the daughter didn't take kindly to the idea that she was never to return there at all. As nearly as I can make it out, she raised quite a rumpus for a

time, and even managed to take a trip west soon after that. When she returned from the trip she was a different girl entirely. She took no interest in anything that went on in Washington—for a time. But at last she began to wake up until finally when about two years more had passed——"

"That makes four, after she first went out there."

"Yes; she began then to manifest interest in what was going on around her. And that brings me down to the present time, so far as she is concerned."

"Yes."

"Rather less than a year ago Gene began to manifest great interest in a young man who is allied to one of the royal families of Europe. He courted her and she responded to his advances. Finally he proposed, and was accepted. That was about six months ago."

"Yes."

"Everything was going smoothly and beautifully until the night of a great reception at the senator's house, in honor of the engaged couple. There, in the midst of the festivities, one of the servants whispered to the young woman, and she followed him from the room. She did not return, and when they looked for her she was found in a dead faint behind the curtains of an alcove that opens off the library."

"Her husband had called upon her, eh?"

"Wait. She was carried to her room. She was very ill. Mind you, the wedding-day for her marriage with the prince—we will call him the duke for the sake of this story——"

"All right."

"The date for the wedding had been fixed that day; it had been announced only a few moments before the young woman was called out. But she was game even after that. She first told her parents that she wished to break the engagement with the duke, but they wouldn't hear of that. Finally she admitted that she loved the duke but could not marry him; and then, to her parents, she told the whole story."

"Which at last you are prepared to tell to me."

"Yes."

"Well?"

"When Gene was left alone at Eighty-three Ranch, Paul Brennan was not there; but he was taken on as an extra soon after that. So the senator had never seen or heard of the man at that time. He is a handsome chap, and I suppose was even handsomer five years ago than he is now. At all events, he succeeded in interesting the girl."

Nick nodded.

"In the meantime the manager of the ranch had interested himself in the governess, who was considerably past thirty, and willing to be married. The paid companion of the senator's daughter was a flighty girl, evidently, who had had some Western training, and among the cow-punchers was an old flame of hers. The result of it was that whenever Gene rode out with her lover she was always well chaperoned. I might take a hurdle over all the preliminaries right here and inform you at once that Paul Brennan and Gene were married at Largo six weeks after the departure of the senator and his wife for Europe."

"They didn't lose any time, did they?"

"Not any."

"Well?"

"It was a secret marriage, of course. It was known only to the six of them, for the manager married the governess and the companion was married to the other cow-puncher, at the same time. These two marriages were duly celebrated, but the other one was kept secret. After that there was plenty of opportunity for Gene and her husband to meet at the manager's house. There were frequent trips taken away from the ranch, and on such occasions the manager always found an excuse to send Brennan away on some fancied errand; only instead of going where he was supposed to go, he invariably joined the others and went with them. You can easily see how it was all accomplished, can't you, without the rest of the cow-punchers getting wise?"

"Sure."

"The manager's wife—his name was Tom Morgan—and Dick Hartly's wife—she who was the companion—were chaperones for Gene. They always stood between Gene and any criticism; and the thing was worked so well that the cow-punchers never guessed that there was anything more than a mutual admiration society in the outlay, so far as Gene was concerned."

"I can understand how it was worked out."

"Later, when Gene absented herself from the ranch for several months, it was generally supposed that she had gone to Washington to visit her father."

"While the truth was?"

"The truth is that the senator's daughter is the wife of Paul Brennan and that she is the mother of a fine boy, so I am told, who should now be rather more than three years old; that she hates Brennan whom she had believed dead at the time she engaged herself to the duke as much as she once loved him; that Brennan has stolen away the boy; that—well, to put it all in a nutshell the senator wants to have a talk with

Brennan by which he hopes to induce the cow-puncher to permit a divorce to be obtained quietly, and——"

"And the senator believes that by holding the counterfeiting business over Brennan's head, the man can be brought to terms. Isn't that the idea?"

"Yes."

CHAPTER III.

NICK CARTER'S YOUNGEST CLIENT.

The detective was silent for so long a time after the chief ceased speaking that the latter looked at him inquiringly and finally asked:

"What are you turning over in your mind now, Nick?"

"I am rather afraid," replied the detective, smiling, "that if I should tell you exactly what I was thinking, you might be inclined to take offense."

"Why so?"

"I'll tell you, anyhow—after I have asked a few questions."

"Well?"

"Didn't you give me to understand that if it were not for this affair of Brennan's with the senator's daughter the department would not take the trouble or spend the money necessary to trace him and arrest him? By 'the department' I mean *you*, of course. Didn't you tell me that?"

"Yes."

"Also that you doubt if there is evidence enough to convict the man, on the charge of uttering counterfeit money, after he is caught?"

"Yes."

"Well, when you asked me what I was thinking about, it was this: I was wondering if you, chief, had or had not—now, don't take offense if you have not—I was wondering if you had manufactured this counterfeit case against Brennan out of whole cloth, just to get the man into trouble, where he can't squirm, and where he will be obliged to accept any terms the senator might make, rather than go to prison as a counterfeiter."

"By——"

"Hold on, chief; I haven't finished!"

"I don't think you need to finish, Carter."

"All right. Just as you say. But I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do, and I'll tell it to you flatfooted. After that you can take it or leave it; and if you choose to take offense, I can't help it."

The chief was silent, and Nick continued:

"Unless you can prove to me before I take up the case that Brennan is a counterfeiter—unless you can prove to me that he has broken the law by a voluntary act of downright dishonesty, I will have nothing to do with the case. I never took a divorce-case in my life, and I won't begin now, for you or for anybody. If Brennan is a scoundrel, from whom any woman should be set free, and you can satisfy me of it, that will be different. If he is a man who would make her life miserable, and if she married him being entirely innocent of his real character—well, I always stand solidly on my feet to help a woman, and particularly a young and innocent one."

"I know that."

"Now, chief, if I do take the case, it will be for a reason exactly opposite the one you have named."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I shall take it with the idea that perhaps I can prove Brennan's innocence, instead of his guilt; with the idea that instead of aiding the senator in getting a divorce for his daughter, I can prevent him from getting one for her; with the idea that I can bring the father and mother of that three-year-old boy together again, so that they will live happily ever after. I shall take it with the full and deliberate intention of sending that duke-prince back to his own country where he should have remained, and of reuniting Brennan and his wife. If you wish me to take it under those circumstances, I am ready."

"I don't know about that, Nick. The senator——"

"Confound the senator! Do you suppose I care a rap what he wants, or what he thinks?"

"No."

"Not much, chief. Let me ask you a few more questions that occur to me."

"Well?"

"Why has not Brennan claimed his wife, during these last three years, or nearly that, since the senator separated them finally by disposing of Eighty-three Ranch?"

"I don't know that."

"What has there been at any time since then to prevent him from going to Washington, and to the door of the senator's house, and proclaiming *'This woman is my wife; we have a child; we were married by a minister of the Church!'* "

"I don't know."

"I think I could answer the question, chief."

"Answer it, then."

"There could be only one reason—*because he loves her.*"

"I don't think I see the point."

"If he loves her and is convinced that she has ceased to love him, he has decided that it would make her unhappy to do such a thing, *and he regards her happiness first.*"

"That may be true, for all I know."

"I will admit that he did wrong to marry the girl without the consent of her parents; but you can't make a right with two wrongs."

"No."

"Perhaps the senator has known more about this affair than he admits. Possibly there was somebody at the ranch to put him wise to the whole business, when he made inquiries. It doesn't seem natural to me that he would dispose of the ranch and put it out of his hands, just because his daughter wished to return there, unless he had also another reason."

"That is quite true, Nick."

"So I will tell you what I think about it, judging only from what you have told me."

"Well?"

"The senator isn't a fool. He has been a politician too long for that. Of course I know who he is already, without your mentioning his name. You have told me enough."

"Yes."

"Well, cow-punchers as a rule are not jackasses, either. All that you have described could not have happened under their noses without some of them getting wise, as they would express it."

"I don't think so, either."

"The senator would not have disposed of the ranch in the manner he did, and have discharged all the outfit unless he had been told about what had been going on. You can bank on it, my friend, that when his daughter told her father all about her husband and child, he already was familiar with the greater part of the story—*and he doubtless had the answer ready.*"

The chief made no reply to this; and Nick continued:

"It wouldn't surprise me a bit to know that the old senator—he is crafty, as I happen to know—had worked up the counterfeit business for his own purposes. Anyhow, that is the way it looks to me. And I shouldn't wonder if you had been imposed upon, too."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, this: You said in the beginning, words to the effect that Brennan has many aliases; also that he has the ability to adopt changes of character, which we will call disguises; but *do you know it for a fact?*"

"No."

"I thought not. Where did you learn the interesting facts?"

"From—— But that doesn't matter."

"No; it does not matter, so long as you do not know it of your own knowledge. You don't, do you?"

"No."

"You don't know of your own knowledge, do you, that the man is a villain?"

"No."

"Nor even that he has uttered counterfeit money?"

"No."

"And save for what the senator has told you, you do not know, do you, that the daughter is not still in love with her husband, and that the duke business is all a game of her worldly-wise parents?"

"No."

"That settles it, chief. I will take the case—whether you wish me to do so or not."

"Eh? I don't understand."

"I will take the case to prove *that Brennan is not a thief, a counterfeiter, and a bad man generally.* I will take the case because I believe I can prove ultimately that he is none of those things; because I believe that by taking it and following it out to the end I can prevent a great wrong, and, more than all else, I will take it because I think that by doing so I can make a man and a woman happy and will be able to restore to that three-year-old child its father and mother."

"By Jove! Nick, if you can do that I will be glad I came to you."

"I believe now that it can be done. I believe it is my duty to do it. When did you ever know me to stand idly aside if an innocent child needed my services?"

"Never."

"I guess not. That three-year-old child is my client. I won't touch one penny of the senator's money, or of the government's money, either. I'll use my own. I'll advance it to that boy, who wants his father and mother; who wants to live with them, and grow up with them, and have their care and their love. If he does live to grow up, he will, if he ever knows about it, which I hope he will not, thank me for my interest."

"Shake hands, Nick."

"Gladly. I suppose the senator knew you were coming to me?"

"Surely."

"Then when you return to Washington tell him that I refused to take the case."

"He will ask me if I told you the whole truth about it."

"Tell him that you did so. Tell him anything you like. It makes no difference to me what you tell him."

The chief made a wry face; then he smiled.

"All right, Nick," he said. "I will take care of that end of it. So you intend to take the case, do you?"

"I have taken that boy, who is three years old, for my client. I am working for him from this moment. I am going to prove that his father is a good man, if it can be proven."

"Suppose it cannot be so proved?"

"Well, I shall give the man the benefit of the doubt, till I know to the contrary."

"And if you find that he *is* a counterfeiter, what will——"

"Chief, it is my habit never to cross bridges till I get to them. It strikes me that the particular bridge in this case is a long way off just at present."

"So it is."

"Now, if, after all I have said, you are disposed to tell me all you know about that counterfeiting business, I'd like to hear it. If you'd rather not, I'll find out what I wish to know by some other means."

"Oh, I'll tell you. After all, what I know would go into a very small space."

"I guessed that."

"Shall I give you the information now?"

"Yes. All that you have, if you will do so."

"Willingly."

"Go ahead, then."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SENATOR'S PLOT.

"In the beginning," said the chief, "it will be necessary for me to hark back a little way."

"Wait a moment. Do you go back to a time before you had your talk with the senator?"

"Yes. Six months before that."

"How long a time is it now since you had that first talk with the senator about his daughter?"

"About two weeks."

"So in beginning this story about the counterfeit business you still begin at a time *since* the senator brought his daughter out of the West and disposed of his holdings in that section."

"Yes."

"All right. Go on."

"Some time ago, it does not matter when, we found that some new 'twenties' that were surprisingly good counterfeits were being uttered, mostly in the West. I took the matter up personally, and finally succeeded in arresting the whole lot of the gang, and in capturing very nearly all of the plates. They had four plates, and we got three of them. We got a five, a ten, and a fifty, but we did not get the one we were looking for really—the twenty."

Nick nodded and smiled.

"I think I know the rest of your story already," he said; "but go on, chief. Excuse me for interrupting you."

"We arrested four men, although we had heard that there were five in the outfit. But we could never get any trace of the other man; not even his name or a description of him. All of the arrested men denied positively that there was a fifth member of their organization."

"Go on."

"Six months ago Red Mike, who is the chief of that gang, sent for me. He told me that he had a confession to make, if I would do something to get him out of prison. I replied that I was not interested in his confessions, and that I would not bargain with him. Then he said:

"'All right; I'll tell you, anyhow.' And he went on to say that he was ready to give the fifth member of the gang what was coming to him. I will quote Red Mike as nearly as possible."

"All right."

"'The fellow ain't done anything for us since we have been in limbo,' Red Mike told me, 'and I think it is time that he took his medicine.' Oh, well, I won't try to quote him, for I do not remember all that he said. But the gist of it was that the fifth man was a fellow they called 'Handsome,' who was the cleverest ever in shoving the queer—in passing the counterfeit stuff."

"Yes."

"He told me that 'Handsome's' true name was Paul Brennan; that he had a dozen aliases, one for each locality where he worked; that sometimes he was a blond, sometimes a dark man, sometimes as red-headed as he was himself; and so on."

"Yes."

"Then he told me that when they first got him to

join with them he worked on Eighty-three Ranch in New Mexico, but that he was born in Montana. He thought I would be likely to find him in the West somewhere. Well, I sent after him, but only to discover that he had disappeared. Then I questioned the remaining three counterfeiters, but they denied the story in full. Later one of them—one of the three, I mean—also sent for me and made the same confession that Red Mike had made. Now, the only proof I have got against the man is what those two counterfeiters have told me. It isn't proof at all. I doubt if Brennan could be convicted on the statements they have made."

"So do I."

"Well, it was some time after I had made a considerable search for Brennan, when the senator came to me with his story. Of course, the moment he mentioned Brennan's name I realized that he was referring to the same man about whom Red Mike had told me; and I said so."

"Why did the senator go to you about his case at all? He must have known that you could do nothing for him."

"He wanted my advice."

"Oh, I see."

"And he wanted me to send him to a good man to look up evidence against Brennan upon——"

"Yes. I know the rest. What then?"

"When I told him that it must be the same man who was connected with the counterfeiters who had worked the West so successfully, and who had maintained headquarters in that part of the country, he immediately jumped at the conclusion that I could make a government case of it. He suggested that I follow the man up, anyhow, arrest him, and hold the counterfeit charge over his head, and all that; so——"

"I understand all the arguments he must have used, quite well. I suppose he told you that his daughter now hates the man; that she wants to be free from him, in order to marry the duke, and a lot more of the same sort, eh?"

"Yes."

"And about the child?"

"Yes. He said the father could have the child if he made it a point to do so."

"Quite generous, I declare. Have you ever seen the daughter?"

"Often."

"I mean in reference to this affair?"

"No."

"Well, chief, it is my private opinion that the old senator cooked up the whole dish for you."

"With Red Mike, do you mean?"

"Yes. That is exactly what I do mean. It is all in keeping with what I said a little while ago. If he can satisfy his daughter that Brennan is a crook, of course she would be willing to give him up."

"Of course."

"And the senator knew about the counterfeiters, of course. It may be, since Red Mike is a Western man, that the senator had known him personally. At all events, he could go to him, and, by making payments and promises, secure his cooperation. It would be a part of the senator's plot to have Red Mike send for you and make his confession about Brennan, and then to wait five or six months himself before he went to you with his story."

"If it is true, it was a deep game to play."

"You're right. And one that would be likely to work, too."

"Yes; but what I don't understand is how Gene could be persuaded to accept the duke and permit an engagement to be announced, when she was already a wife."

"My dear chief, she has been played upon as deftly as you were. Don't you see that the senator, with the knowledge he possessed, would have the game in his own hands as long as nobody knew that he was wise to what had happened?"

"Yes."

"It would have been an easy matter to persuade somebody among the old Eighty-three men who had known about Brennan, to write to the senator's daughter, saying that Brennan was dead. Oh, there were plenty of ways in which it could be worked out by a person as crafty as the old statesman. What he did not reckon upon was that Brennan would show up in Washington the very night of the announcement of the betrothal to the duke."

"I see."

"It is a mixed-up mess, if I have figured it out correctly."

"You're right it is."

"Well, chief, I am going to Washington to-night. I'm going to see Gene and have a talk with her."

"Do you think——"

"Yes, I do think it wise. I would like to know just what her father has told her. I want to know exactly how she feels about the matter."

"Then, so far as the senator is concerned, I am to consider that you are out of the case?"

"Absolutely; or, rather, I was never in it at all. My client is the boy. By the way, do you happen to know that boy's given name?"

"Yes. It is Dallas."

"Good. The name of my client in this affair is Dallas Brennan. A good name, too."

"I can see quite plainly that I'm going to have no end of a row with the senator, Nick."

"Oh, perhaps not. But you are at liberty to tell him that I am working for the boy, if you wish to tell him that."

"It isn't likely. Things are bad enough as they are. How will you manage to see the senator's daughter without his knowledge?"

"I don't know that, as yet. I will find that out when I get to Washington. But now, another question."

"Yes."

"Do you know anything about Brennan at the present time? Have you any idea where he can be found?"

"No more than what was told to me by the senator."

"What was that?"

"It was his idea that the man is somewhere around his old haunts in Montana. The senator thinks that he is punching cows, or doing something of the sort, somewhere in that region now. He would not say any more than that, if he knew more; but now, since what you have said to me, I have an idea that the old fellow knew all the time pretty nearly where he is."

"Doubtless Brennan told his wife, in that interview he had with her, the night she fainted away."

"Very likely."

"And she would have told her father."

"I suppose so."

"Well, that is about as far as we can get in the matter at the present time. My method will be to go directly to Washington and seek an interview with Mrs. Brennan—or Gene, as I will continue to call her. After that——"

"Well?"

"After that I must be guided by circumstances. You see, if the senator has already done so much to prove that Brennan is a criminal, he will not stop there. He has gone right on with the affair. He will have found another way to assist you before you have really begun work on the case. I shouldn't wonder if we would sooner or later find the evidence already manufactured to convict Brennan. If the old senator has worked so thoroughly on what he has done in the matter, you may rest assured that he has not stopped at that."

"It is a strange thing, Carter, that I never thought of all this before."

"I don't think so. In your place and position in the matter, I would have thought about as you did, I believe. But as it is——"

"You have viewed it very differently."

"Perhaps so. But a part of that is possibly due to the fact that divorce-cases are affairs that I will never touch."

"Well, this isn't one."

"Not at all—now. I am retained by a three-year-old boy who wants his father and mother, and who wishes them to make a happy home for him. Are you going?"

"Yes."

CHAPTER V.

THE WIFE AND MOTHER.

Nick Carter went to Washington that afternoon following upon his conversation with the chief of the secret service.

The first thing he did after his arrival was to ascertain that both branches of congress were in session, and that the senator from the West, in whom he was chiefly interested, was occupying his seat in the upper chamber.

Realizing from this fact that the coast would be practically clear for him, he took a carriage and had himself driven at once to the senator's house, where he sent an engraved card which, it should be said, did not bear his own name, to the statesman's daughter Gene. Underneath the name on the card he had written this message:

"Although I am a stranger, will you be kind enough to receive me for a few moments on matters of importance to yourself?"

He was shown into the smaller of two parlors, where presently the young woman came to him, and although Nick Carter had seen pictures of the senator's daughter in the newspapers, and had read more than one description of her beauty and grace of manner, he was nevertheless surprised at the vision of loveliness which glided into his presence at that time.

The detective noticed that she was very pale, and that she was gowned quite soberly. He thought, too, that he could see the traces of mental suffering upon

her face and in the wan smile she gave him as she paused near the center of the room, greeting him with a slight inclination of her head.

"You wish to see me, sir?" she inquired, glancing at the card as she did so, and adding, "upon matters of importance to myself?"

"Yes, if you please," he replied, rising and bowing. "I should say to you at once, however, that, in announcing myself to you by card, I did not send up my true name. I am Nick Carter, a detective, from New York, and if in the questions I wish to ask of you you should get the idea that I am intruding myself upon personal affairs which should be none of my business, please try to be patient with me until we have quite understood each other."

There was a wondering glance in her eyes while she faltered before she made any response to this statement of Nick's. Then she replied:

"Very well, sir, if you will tell me what your business is."

"My business is," replied Nick Carter, "concerning a young man whom you knew in the West; a young man whose name is Paul Brennan."

She gave a slight start at this and became a shade or two paler, if that were possible. Nick thought that she bit her lip in perplexity, but she answered only by the one word:

"Yes?"

"It has been charged," said the detective, "that Paul Brennan is not the sort of man he appeared to be at the time you knew him. I have been told that he is charged with having committed a felony against the laws of the United States. I have come to you to ask you to help me in proving his innocence, if that is possible, and if you have the desire to do so."

The girl, for to all appearances she still was a girl, although she was twenty-three years old, took one step forward toward the detective, then paused irresolutely.

"Oh, sir!" she exclaimed, and stopped.

"Well?" said Nick.

She did not answer, and the detective continued:

"Am I to understand that if Paul Brennan is innocent of the charges that have been laid against him, you would like to have that innocence established?"

She had recovered herself by now, and before she replied she seated herself upon a chair facing the detective, then she answered:

"Most certainly, sir."

"Do you think it is in your power to give me any assistance in the matter I have explained to you?"

"I do not know."

"You knew Paul Brennan quite well, did you not?"

"Yes," she faltered.

"Am I mistaken in the information I have, which is to the effect that you passed nearly if not quite two years on your father's ranch in New Mexico, during which time your father and mother were absent?"

"Yes," she answered hesitatingly, "that is quite true."

"And you came to know Paul Brennan quite well, did you not?"

"Very well, indeed. Yes, sir."

"Did you ever discover anything about him that would lead you even now, at this late date, to regard him as a criminal character?"

"No, sir. Oh, no."

"I gather from your manner that this is not the first time you have heard the subject mentioned."

"No, sir. It is not."

"Have you, perhaps, discussed the question with your father, the senator?"

She did not reply to that question, and Nick saw that her eyes were widening and darkening, and that a flush that was either of anger or, at least, of resentment colored each cheek. When she did respond it was by asking a question.

"Will you tell me why you have come here to discuss these matters with me?" she asked.

Nick leaned forward in his chair, regarding her keenly and searchingly for a moment, and then, in a low tone, but uttering each word distinctly, he replied:

"I have come to you because I am fully informed concerning the history of those two years you passed on your father's ranch in New Mexico, Mrs. Brennan."

She started to her feet with a little gasping cry, clasping her hands together as she did so. But she sank back again upon her chair, and after a moment's silence, during which Nick pitied her, indeed, because she looked so frightened, she asked in a low tone:

"Did you come here as Paul Brennan's friend, or as mine?"

It was Nick's turn to rise now, and he crossed the little space that intervened between them, until he stood before her, looking down upon her white, drawn face and into her frightened eyes; and then he smiled reassuringly, as he replied in the kindliest tone he could use:

"I have come here principally in the interest of a young person who is named Dallas Brennan."

She uttered a startled cry at this and clutched at the arms of her chair, and she faltered:

"You are, indeed, very well informed, sir."

"Yes," replied the detective.

For a moment she stared at him with eyes that seemed to look through and beyond him, and then, without a change of expression and in a tone of voice so low that the detective could scarcely hear the words, she asked:

"Can you tell me where Dallas Brennan is now?"

"No," replied Nick, surprised at the question; "do you not know yourself?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"You saw his father about two weeks ago, did you not?"

"Yes," she faltered, "in the library of this house; in the room that adjoins this one."

"Did he not tell you where Dallas Brennan is?"

"No, sir. He did not know. He believed that Dallas was with me."

"Do you mean," exclaimed the detective, shocked more than he would have cared to admit at the moment, "that the boy has been stolen away from his father?"

"Yes, so his father claimed."

"Since when?"

"Oh, I do not know, sir. I do not remember what was said during that short interview I had with my husband. He came upon me so suddenly and so unexpectedly. I had been told that Paul Brennan was dead. I believed it until that night when he came here and sought my presence, to demand an explanation for the announcement that was made that night."

"Yes," said Nick, "I know what that announcement was."

"Paul believed that I had anticipated the abduction of Dallas from him. He thought that Dallas was here in my father's house, or, if not that, he at least charged me with having hidden my boy away somewhere from his father. And then, Mr. Carter, I fainted; and when I came to my senses again my father and mother and several others were in the room with me, and Paul had gone."

"Was it that night that you made your confession to your father about the marriage in New Mexico?" asked Nick.

"Yes."

"Did your father admit to you at that time that he already knew about the marriage?"

She looked at him with great surprise in her eyes before she answered. Presently she said:

"Yes, he admitted to me that he had known about it for a long time."

"And was it then that he told you about the charges against your husband?"

"Yes."

"And you believed them?"

"I was forced to believe them."

"Why?"

"My father had proofs, or what purported to be proofs, of these statements."

"What sort of proofs?"

"The written confession of two of his confederates, sworn to before a notary."

"The confessions of Red Mike and another man?" asked Nick.

"Yes."

"You believed them absolutely?"

"I could not do otherwise."

"May I ask, in that case," said the detective, after a moment's pause, "if you are a party to the present efforts of your father to hunt Paul Brennan down for his supposed complicity in that counterfeiting business with Red Mike and others, and that you are also a party to the ultimate desire of the senator to obtain a divorce for you from your husband, in order that you may become the wife of the duke?"

The question startled the woman into new life. She straightened in her chair, was silent a moment, and then replied:

"If having been merely passive makes me a party to these things, sir, I must answer in the affirmative, but I must say to you that I am not a willing party to any such plans, for the reason that in my heart and soul I do not believe that Paul Brennan was ever guilty of a dishonorable act in his life."

"Save the one of making you his wife without your parents' consent," smiled the detective.

"Even that, sir, was less his fault than my own. But I knew how my father would object to having me become the wife of a cowboy on his ranch. And it was my fault more than Paul's that the wedding occurred as it did."

"I must ask you another question now, Mrs. Brennan, of distinctly personal character. I hope you will not be offended, and I trust that you will see your way clear to answer it frankly."

"Yes, what is it?" she asked.

"Do you love your husband?"

She started to her feet and her eyes shone brightly through tears that formed in their depths, but she replied quite calmly with the two words:

"I do."

"You have no wish to be separated from him, then?"

"Not if he is an honorable man, as I believe him to be."

"Suppose, then, that I should succeed in proving that he is entirely innocent of the charges that have been made against him, would you, in such a case, return to him?"

"Oh, sir, gladly, sir—only he would not have me now."

"Why?" asked Nick.

"He does not love me any more."

"Nonsense," exclaimed the detective. "Of course, he loves you. But you must remember, Mrs. Brennan, that he is in a very delicate and extremely false position so far as you are concerned. He looks at the whole circumstance from a man's point of view. He knows that your father hates him, and has perhaps been made to believe that you have changed toward him, also. At the very least, he realizes that your parents would have spared no effort to prejudice you against him; and, moreover, in view of what you have just told me concerning the disappearance of Dallas and of Paul Brennan's belief that you are responsible for it, he is resentful."

She took a step nearer to him, and, with her hands clasped in front of her, said slowly and distinctly:

"Mr. Carter, Paul Brennan is my husband and I love him. I have always loved him since the first day I ever saw him. If you can establish his innocence of the charges that have been made against him, and can bring us together again, you will have performed a service for which I will be grateful to my dying day. I want my husband and my boy. I can say no more than that."

The library adjoined the room in which they were talking, and through the open door Nick could see a table upon which there were writing-materials. He pointed toward it now, and replied:

"Mrs. Brennan, if you seat yourself at that table in the library and put into writing all that you have just said to me in that last statement, I will engage to do the rest."

Without a word, she glided by him and went into the next room, and a moment later, while the detective waited, he could hear the pen moving rapidly across the paper as she wrote.

He did not interrupt her, and after a little she came into the room where he was again, and placed an inclosed envelope in the detective's hands.

"I have addressed the letter to my husband," she said calmly, "for you to deliver to him in person whenever and wherever you can. I would like you to read it if you will do so."

"No," said Nick, smiling. "I will not read what you have written. Your husband's eyes alone should see that;" and he moistened the flap of the envelope and sealed it, after which he placed it in his pocket.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OUTFIT AT EIGHTY-THREE.

We need not go into the rest of that interview between Nick Carter and the wife of Paul Brennan, which lasted during another hour, before the detective finally took his departure. Suffice it to say that when he did go away from the house a perfect and a very thorough understanding existed between them.

When the detective was upon the street and walking slowly toward the hotel where he had decided to stay that night, he told himself that the case had suddenly assumed greater complications than he had anticipated.

Having taken it as he did, and with the promise he had uttered of making two people happy who otherwise would have been miserable, and of restoring the parents to that three-year-old boy, whom, without the boy's knowledge, he had taken as his client, he realized now that he had a threefold duty to perform. He must find Paul Brennan; he must establish Paul Brennan's innocence, and he must recover possession of the child for its father, who was its rightful guardian.

He used the long-distance telephone as soon as he arrived at the hotel, with the result that between six and seven hours later Patsy, who was summoned from New York, joined him there.

"Patsy," the detective said to him, after he had told the story, "I am going West to-night, but I intend to leave you here in Washington. I want you to begin to-morrow morning to go wherever the senator goes, to know everything that he does, and to enable yourself to inform me of the names of every person with whom he talks until I tell you to stop. There isn't any doubt in my mind that the senator has had that child abducted, and sooner or later he will do something, or say something, or go somewhere, to reveal the fact that he does know. The moment you find out anything positive about it, you are to wire

me at once, or in some manner get the information to me, no matter where I happen to be."

He was silent for a moment after that, and presently Patsy asked him:

"Have you any idea where you can find Paul Brennan?"

"Yes," replied the detective. "I think I know fairly well where I can find him. I questioned the senator's daughter very carefully on that point, and although she doesn't know where he is, she has given me the idea that he isn't very far from the old ranch where she first met him. At all events, I am going there directly from here."

"I should suppose," said Patsy, "that he would be anywhere but there."

"Why so?"

"Well, I think, in his position, I would be humping myself to find the boy."

"You forget," replied the detective, "that Paul Brennan believes the boy's mother has got him."

It was five days after that when Nick Carter arrived at Eighty-three Ranch.

He rode up to the ranch house as any man might have done who was traveling through the country and had selected it as a temporary stopping-place. And when he turned his horse into the corral and wheeled about to receive the greeting of one of the cow-punchers who had come forward to offer him assistance, he was not surprised to receive the information, in reply to a question he asked, that Tom Morgan had again become manager of the outfit.

Tom Morgan, it will be remembered, was manager at the time when the senator's daughter met and finally married Paul Brennan. And Nick had figured it all out in his own mind that this man had been induced for a money consideration to lend what aid he could to the machinations of the senator in carrying out the plots and plans he had formulated.

It was Tom Morgan who had married Gene's governess. And it was a foregone conclusion in Nick's mind that this man had been prevailed upon to assist the senator in his plot, not only by being well paid for it in cash, but also by having restored to him his former position as manager over the great cattle-ranch outfit.

"My name's Carter," said the detective. "Would you mind telling me how I may call you?"

"Oh, I answer to most any name," replied the cow-puncher. "But Dick Hartly is the one I'm known best by."

So we see that the detective was at once in contact with the two men he most desired to become acquainted with, Tom Morgan and Dick Hartly, for these were the two who had been chiefly instrumental in assisting Paul Brennan and Gene during their love-making, and the clandestine marriage which followed it.

The detective's idea was that the senator could not have formulated his plans and carried them out so perfectly without the active assistance and cooperation of at least one of these men, and, of course, it was infinitely better to have them both.

"Ever hear of a man named Paul Brennan?" was Nick's next question, asked while they were walking from the corral to the bunk-house; and it should be explained right here that Nick had gotten himself up so that he was himself, to all appearances and in every expression of voice and figure of speech he used, as much a cow-puncher as his companion.

"Sure thing," was the reply.

"Does he happen to be round here right now?" asked the detective, halting and waiting to receive the answer before the two men who were approaching them should get near enough to hear it.

"No, he ain't," was the reply; and Nick moved on again.

"Do you happen to know where he is?" asked Nick.

"Can't say, old-timer."

"Could you give me any idea where I could round him up? I'm rather anxious to see him."

"I'm afraid I couldn't give you the brand of his outfit just now, stranger."

"When did you see him last?"

"Oh, I don't know, rightly. I reckon it was a matter of a month ago. You seem mighty interested in Paul Brennan, and seeing as how this outfit used to think considerable of him, maybe you wouldn't mind telling me just what you're trying to rope and brand at the present writing?"

"I'm looking for Paul Brennan," replied the detective, "because I'm a friend of his, and because I've got something important to tell him and a message to deliver to him when I find him."

The detective knew that this reply would get Dick Hartly to guessing if, as Nick surmised, he had cast his sympathies with the senator's side of the question.

However, Nick did not really believe that the man had done so, for his face was as open and honest and frank as a countenance could be, and his manner was as hearty and genuine as one cares to discover.

Not so, however, with one of the men who now joined them, and in whom the detective greatly believed he saw Tom Morgan, the manager.

Morgan was, as far as appearances went, a typical cow-puncher, who had risen to a position of importance.

He was taller than the average man by three or four inches, and was built in proportion. He was a handsome man, too, of a striking, personality, and gave evidences of being past forty years old; but there was a shiftiness about his eyes, and a manner he had of compressing his thin lips, and a general coldness about him which impressed the detective unfavorably. Nick figured it that he was a sort of man who would be loyal just so long as it was distinctly his interest to remain so, and no longer.

However, his greeting was warm and hearty enough as he came forward. Greetings in that country are always so, unless there is some plainly apparent reason for them being otherwise.

"Hello, old-timer!" he exclaimed, taking in Nick's appearance in the character he had assumed by one comprehensive glance. "Are you looking to throw your war-bag down here with us?"

"Well, I haven't rightly determined that just yet," replied the detective; "but seeing as how I was riding through, and had heard a good deal about Eighty-three, I thought I'd stop and gnaw a bone with you."

"All right, you're welcome to stay as long as you like," was the reply. "I'm Tom Morgan, the manager."

"And I'm Carter, from nowhere in particular," replied Nick.

"Carter is looking for Paul Brennan," said Dick Hartly, interrupting them at that moment, and Nick could see a flash of surprised caution in the eyes of the manager as the remark was made.

The reply to it was, however, a mere shrug of the shoulders, followed by announcement that Brennan was no longer with the Eighty-three outfit.

"Maybe you know where I could round him up," said Nick, stepping forward and walking back toward the bunk-house beside the manager.

"Sorry, but I'm afraid I can't. What do you want of him, anyhow?"

"Oh, I'm just a friend of his with a message to deliver to him," replied the detective.

The manager was silent for a moment, and then he announced:

"I've known Paul Brennan for a right smart time, Carter, but it ain't down in my diary that I ever heard him talking about a gazabo by your name. Maybe you'd be kind enough to elucidate?"

"Oh, there aren't any explanations to be made. It's merely as I said, that I've got a message for him."

"That so? Who's it from?"

"I reckon," was Nick's slowly drawled reply, "that all particulars about that message will keep without being on ice until I have delivered them to the party addressed."

As the detective made this reply he glanced from one face to the other of the three men who were with him, and he saw that Dick Hartly and the third man exchanged quick glances, while it seemed to make no impression whatever upon the manager.

But there was no more said upon the subject at that time, for they arrived just then at the entrance to the bunk-house, where several others of the outfit had stepped outside the door to welcome the stranger, and in a moment more they were all talking together, after the haphazard manner of such occasions.

Of course, the detective was questioned, although not at all impertinently, concerning whence he had come and whither he was bound; but he had already anticipated this likelihood, and had prepared himself accordingly; and so one after another he rolled off the names of different brands in the Northwestern country, Montana especially, which were known, at least by hearsay, to the men with whom he was talking, and which, therefore, gave them the idea, without Nick's finding it necessary to make the unqualified statement, that he had been a Montana cow-puncher and that it was up in a Northwestern country where he had known Paul Brennan.

He mentioned the Lazy-K outfit, which belongs to Charlie Russell, the Seven-up, the T-U, the Flying-X, and several others with such ease and so much outward appearance of familiarity with them that he straightway succeeded in placing himself on a good footing with these men of the Eighty-three.

But Nick Carter had already determined that he would lose no time in getting Dick Hartly away from the others of the outfit, and in pumping him dry of all the information he possessed relative to Paul Brennan.

And he fancied he could do this without much trouble. From what he had already seen of the cow-puncher, and judged concerning him from his appearance, he believed that Hartly was a man who would be loyal to his friends, and Nick thought it more than likely that he would discover a valuable assistant in the other.

CHAPTER VII.

NICK CARTER FINDS A FRIEND.

It was shortly before dark that evening when Nick Carter found the opportunity he sought of having a few moments' uninterrupted conversation with Dick Hartly. It came about in quite a natural manner, too.

The detective, not being a cigarette-smoker, had lighted his pipe and strolled alone across the grass to a grove of trees half a mile from the bunk-house, and he was rather surprised to find Hartly already there.

The man was seated on the ground, and was gazing moodily across the plains at nothing in particular. His horse, with the reins trailing on the ground in front of him, waited a little distance away. It looked exactly as if Hartly had gone out there alone to think.

"Hello!" exclaimed the detective. "You look as if you had something on your mind, Hartly. Did you lose all your pay at seven-up last night?"

"Not much; but the first guess was a corker."

"About having something on your mind?"

"Yes."

"Well, if it's unpleasant, get it off as soon as possible. 'Tain't any good at all, having unpleasant thoughts, nohow. Never do it myself."

"You brought 'em," was the laconic rejoinder.

"I did? Brought what?" asked Nick, surprised.

"This business that's on my mind."

"Oh, well, if I brought it to you, get rid of it right now. What did I do to you?"

"It was what you said about Brenny."

"Who?"

"Paul Brennan; Brenny, we used to call him."

"That so? Wasn't he ever called 'Handsome'?"

"Naw; not here he wasn't."

"Oh! Who did call him by that name, then?"

"Nobody ever called him that that I've heard of; not to his face, anyhow. It's an infernal lie, that's what it is!"

"What is?"

"To say he was ever called 'Handsome' by any bunch uh outlaws like that one."

"Like what one?"

"Oh, you've heard about it, or you wouldn't have asked that question. That is just what I was thinking about when you rode up. It is what I came out here alone to think over."

"Say, Hartly, don't you reckon you're getting plenty mixed in your confabulations? I can't somehow keep to your trail a little bit. If you'll tell me where you're at, I'll try to follow along; but I'm not much good at a guessing-match."

Hartly got slowly up from his seat on the ground and stood in front of the detective, looking at him squarely, while his eyes narrowed to slits and an ugly gleam came into them.

"I'll tell you what I was cogitating," he said finally. "I was turnin' it over in my mind whether I'd ask you to ride out here with me and have a talk, or if I'd call for your say-so inside the bunk-house; but now that you're here, I reckon I'll get it off my mind without any further delay."

"That's a good idea—whatever it is," replied Nick, seating himself on the grass.

"First off, mister," said Hartly slowly, "I want you to understand that Paul Brennan is a friend of mine, and that I am his friend from my spurs to my forelock, and then some."

"Glad to hear it. Shake!"

"Not yet. I'll shake after I've said my say, providing I think it's right to shake with you; but I ain't dead sure uh that jest now. I'd like to ask you some questions, but it ain't proper till I've had my own say. Paul Brennan has had a bunch uh trouble in the last few years, and just now he don't rightly know who his friends are, and likewise who they ain't. I used to be here with him several years ago, before we was all fired, including Morgan, the manager. Well, when I was fired I drifted up North, and went across the line into Canada, where I stayed on and on till I plumb forgot that I had any friends left down here. But finally I drifted down into Montana again, and there I met up with Brenny one day; and say, he was almost as glad to see me as I was to see him."

"I don't doubt it."

"It strikes me as kinder funny, Carter, that I never heard Brenny mention your name."

"Oh, I don't know. We'll talk about that when you've finished your layout."

"All right. Well, I up and suggested to Brenny that we hike for old Eighty-three. He sees me and calls, so we drifts here together."

"When was that?"

"We'll call it less than a year ago. It was not that long, but that's near enough for the present purposes."

"I reckon so."

"We stopped on the way down several times, to give the kid a chance to condition up a bit, for travelin' was sorter hard on the little chap, and——"

"Whoa, Dobbin? Which kid? What kid? Whose kid? What the blazes are you talking about?"

"Brenny had his kid with him; likewise a decent old Mexican woman to take care of it. Do you mean to say that you didn't know he had a kid?"

"I don't remember that I said anything about it," replied Nick. "I'll do my part of the talking when you get through."

"All right. Well, we stopped a lot uh times on the trip down, but when we finally got here you could have knocked us both over with a feather when we found that the old boss, Morgan, was here again as manager. He had been back only about a week when we got here, and he seemed right glad to meet up with us again. He took us on at once, and we went to work that day. Brenny fixed the kid and the Mexican woman up in an adobe shack so's they was all right, and for a time everything went along fine. It was almost like old times, 'though they was mighty different at that, if you should be asked."

"How so?"

"Well, when we was here together last before that time, Brenny had a wife with him, although it was a secret that they was married; and I had a wife with me that there wasn't any secret about. But this time my wife was dead—she died while I was in Canada; couldn't stand the climate, I expect, or something like that. Brenny's wife wasn't here, either."

"Where was she?"

"Don't you know?"

"I ain't talking—yet."

"She had left him—plumb; that's what. His heart was broke. She went East, saying that she would come back in a month; but she didn't come, and then he got a letter saying that she was never coming at all."

"From her?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe it."

"Say, stranger, it wouldn't be plumb safe to call me a liar on any other subject than that one, but I wish that I didn't believe it, either."

"Well, I don't believe it. Go on."

"One day about two months ago, or a little more, the kid disappeared. Brenny had been sent off on a five days' drive by the boss at the time, and he didn't know it till he got back. In fact, nobody here knew about it, really. The Mexican woman and the kid disappeared at the same time, and when we found it out it was supposed that she had carried it off. Mebby she did; I don't know. But Brenny allowed that he knew what had happened, and the day after he got back from the drive he asked for his pay and drifted."

"Hasn't he been back since?"

"No; not as any one could notice."

"Do you know where he went?"

"Yes."

"Haven't you heard from him since?"

"You're asking a heap uh questions, mister. I'm jest giving you an outline uh things, so's to lead up to what I want to say to you."

"Oh, I see."

"It wasn't long after Brenny left here, after the kid was stolen, before Morgan got a letter from the East—from the old boss. He's a senator or something; but, anyhow, he said in the letter——"

"Wait a minute. Can I interrupt you?"

"You've done it already. What for?"

"You didn't tell me who Brenny married, did you?"

"No; and I ain't going to—right now."

"Well, go on, then."

"Morgan got a letter from the old boss, in which he said a lot about some things that had turned up back there in the East about a puncher we used to have here, which the same was Brenny. The senator let on that he didn't have no idea where Brenny was now, but warned Morgan that if he should happen to show up here, not to take him on, because it had been discovered that he'd been outlawed. There used to be a feller around here years ago called Red; which his name was Mike, or something or other. He was a thief and a rustler and everything else that was bad. He finally took to making bad money, and had a den somewhere in Colorado, along with some others of the same brand. Well, Red had been arrested, according to that letter, and was in prison, and he had confessed a lot."

"A criminal's confession, eh?"

"That's what. He had charged in his confession that Brenny was one of his pals; at least, that's what the letter said, although I know it to be the biggest lie that was ever uttered. Paul Brennan never did a thing in his life that wasn't on the square, and I'll kill the man who says he did."

"Good!" replied Nick.

"Now, stranger, all that brings me to what I want to say to you."

"Well?"

"The first break you made when you got here was to ask about Brenny, and—now I want you to understand that I'm giving it to you straight, and that if you don't like it, I'm willing to back what I say—and I sizes you up for a detective feller what's looking for

him. What I want to know is, am I right or am I wrong?"

"You are correct," was the cool reply, "although you are not——"

Nick got no further than that, for, like a flash, Hartly pulled his gun and had him covered.

"Hold hard right where you are!" he demanded. "I had it all figured out that I was right, and I wanta tell you right now that you can't come here and——"

"Wait!" said Nick sharply. "I am a detective and I am looking for Brenny; but I am looking for him to help him; not to do him harm. Didn't I tell you that I had a message for him? Well, that message is from his wife, to tell him that she loves him; and she has told me that she wants to go back to him just as soon as ever he'll take her back."

"Stranger, is that correct?"

"It is. Absolutely so."

"Will you shake on that?"

"Yes."

"Then I reckon we'll do it. You can give me the rest of the story afterward;" and having returned his gun to the holster, he solemnly extended his hand toward the detective.

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER IS TOLD TO GET OUT.

"I know the whole story," the detective told his new friend. "I am sorry for you in that you have lost your wife, Hartly. I am glad that you are still loyal to Brennan."

"You bet your life I am. No better fellow ever lived than he is, all wool and a yard wide any way you take him."

"Good," said the detective. "I thought as much. Now, Hartly, I want you to sit down and listen while I tell you my side of the story, just as I know it, and after I am through I want to ask you a lot of questions."

"All right, Carter. Go as far as you like."

Nick related to the cowboy then not only all that he knew about the affair, but also all that he suspected about the plots of the senator. He told about the call he had received from a member of the secret service, sent there to him by the senator; he told about his call upon the senator's daughter, and related the conversation they had together.

"And now," he said, in conclusion, "since I arrived at this place and have had a chance to see Morgan, I have made up my mind that the manager betrayed Brennan and the girl at the time the senator and his wife came here to take Gene back East with them. At least, that is my idea of it."

"I haven't a doubt of it in the world," said Hartly. "After that the old fox worked out his plans to suit himself. He got his daughter back East, and then he fired the whole outfit from here. Then he disposed of the ranch, or appeared to do so. But I think, if the records could be searched, it would be found that Morgan has never been out of the senator's pay for a minute."

"And I agree with you."

"Where is Morgan's wife?"

"She is here; but say, she is a holy terror on wheels! Scold? Say, she could scold the spurs off'n a cow-puncher's heels; that's what. She tried to make up to Brenny's kid, but the little shaver wouldn't have it nohow; not any in his'n. But I haven't the least doubt, now that you have told me all about it, that Morgan sent Brenny away on that drive a-purpose to get him out uh the way while the kid was stolen. I was sent away, too, in another direction, but I got back sooner than Brenny. Maybe I ought to tell you another funny thing that Morgan did after Brenny left here the last time."

"What was that?"

"You remember I told you that Brenny lived in one of the 'dobe houses with the kid and the old Mexican woman?"

"Yes."

"Well, after Morgan got that letter about Brenny, he called two of the boys to follow him to Brenny's 'dobe, saying he was going to search it. I trailed along, because I wanted to see what was going on. Well, while I was watchin' I saw Morgan spot a wad of money that was hidden in a hole that had been dug in the floor under the bed in Brenny's room; and from behind a loose 'dobe brick he pulled out something else that was heavy. I don't know what it was, only I heard him say it was some kind of a plate. Then he took the hull lot of it up to the house, and after calling the fellers to witness what it was and what he did with it, he wrapped it in a package, sealed it, and put it all inside the safe in his office. That's what, Carter."

"Can't you guess what it was and what it was for?"

"Sure. It was queer money, and the other thing was what they use to make it."

"Right. But don't you see what it was for?"

"No; I don't; not quite."

"All that, Hartly, was evidence put there by Morgan, at the command of the senator, to be used in case Brenny could not be brought to terms. It was also to convince his wife of his guilt, so that she would refuse to have anything more to do with him. The senator intends, if his schemes should work out, to give Brenny his choice between prison and relinquishing all right to his wife and child. That is the game."

"Gee! I wish we could prove it."

"We can."

"How?"

"There is only one way, Hartly—and it will be dangerous."

"Say, do you s'pose I care about that? What is it?"

"We must see the inside of that safe in Morgan's office."

"Wow! I don't know how we are going to do that—unless we watch out and steal the thing when Morgan is off on the range some day, and pile it onto the back of a cayuse and——"

"No. I know a better way than that."

"Do you? What is it?"

"You must help to get inside his office when he is not there; or, if necessary, when he is there."

"Hold on, Carter; that last would never do at all."

"Why not?"

"I'll tell you. I don't like Morgan—I never did like him only during the time when we was all getting married together—but he's got grit and courage. He ain't afraid of a stack of wildcats a mile high. He'd fight a buzz-saw if it got in his way, and he's as quick as he is stout. He sleeps like a cat, too, and that office of his'n is right next to the room where he sleeps."

"Then we must go to it when he is not there."

"Well, when he ain't there, his wife mostly is; and I'd about as soon tackle Morgan's guns as her tongue."

"We've got to get inside of that safe!"

"What do you want to take out of it?"

"The money you referred to; also the plate; but, more than all, I wish to take a look at the letters Morgan has received from the senator."

"Letters? Oh, by thunder, that's so!"

"He has received letters from the senator, hasn't he?"

"On the average of about one a week."

"Good. You see, Morgan is the sort of a man who would retain such letters. He would never destroy them. He is shrewd enough to know that they would be of value to him as against the senator some day. Don't you see that?"

"Yes."

"I think if we could get at those letters we would find the whole plan outlined in them; at least, so much of it as Morgan has been directed to do. And it would not surprise me if we found out from them just what was done with the little boy when he was stolen away."

"Carter, you're right, by thunder!"

"Then will you assist me, Hartly?"

"You bet your life I will."

"When shall we do it?"

"I don't know."

"When is Morgan likely to be away for a day?"

"There is no telling that. He might not go away for a month, and he might go this afternoon, or to-morrow, if it should happen to occur to him to do so."

"In that case, Hartly, we won't wait for him to go. We'll—or, rather, I will do it."

"Do what?"

"I was going to say that I will enter his office this very night, when all the outfit is sleeping. I'll take my chances on his hearing me. You can keep watch and——"

"And plug him with a chunk uh lead if he interferes too soon; eh?"

"No. There must not be any bloodshed in this matter; but you can rope him, maybe."

"Anyhow, I'll be there, and I'll do whatever seems to be necessary."

"That will do nicely. We will say to-night, then?"

"Yes. What time, Carter?"

"At midnight. The boys will all be asleep by that time. Slip out of your bunk when you get the chance, and meet me down at the big corral."

"That's agreed."

"And now, Hartly, have you any idea where Brenny can be found?"

"Not the slightest. I haven't heard a word from him since the day he arrived in Washington. He said he was going there when he left here, because that is where he supposed they had taken his kid. He promised to write as soon as he got there, and he did it; and in that letter he promised to write again the next day, but I ain't heard from him sence."

"That is rather strange, isn't it?"

"I'll tell you what I think about it, Carter. I believe that the old senator has got the kibosh on him

somehow, and has laid him aside for repairs, or something like that."

"No. The senator doesn't know where he is. If he had known that, he would not have done all that he has in the matter. If the senator knew where Brenny was at the time he sent the detective to New York, he would have put that man on his track. Brenny has somehow escaped that much, anyhow. My own idea is that the whole affair was too much for him, and that he was taken sick and went to a hospital, or something of the sort. He might have met with an accident."

"That's so. Unless he is looking around for the kid."

"That isn't likely, for the reason that he believes his wife knows where the boy is."

"Well, it's a mixed-up mess, anyhow. I wish you'd tell me something about Genie."

"You liked her, did you, Hartly?"

"Well, except just one, I thought she was the sweetest girl that ever lived—till she seemed to go plumb back on Brenny; I didn't like her none after that; not any. But now when you tell me that she didn't, and that it was all jest the working out of the plans her dad laid against her and Brenny, that changes the hull layout, doesn't it? How was she looking?"

"Very sad and troubled, Hartly. She loves her husband. I would swear to that."

"I reckon you're right, Carter. Hark! There is the horn."

"What is that for, Hartly?"

"It's the call. When we're any of us around and the boss wants anything in particular, he blows on that horn, and all who are within hearing hike to him. It ain't a usual thing, either. I say, you don't suppose that Brenny has come, and that Morgan has arrested him, do you?"

The detective leaped to his feet.

"More than likely," he said. "Let's get back to the bunk-house as quickly as possible."

As they rode up in front of it a little later, however, there was no sign of the arrival of anybody at the ranch. On the contrary, Morgan, with half a dozen of the men around him, was standing there, and all of them were evidently watching the approach of Nick Carter and Hartly as they rode up together and dismounted.

"What's the horn for, Morgan?" Hartly asked, as he dismounted; but Morgan, without replying to the question, addressed himself directly to the detective.

"Is your name Carter? Didn't you say it was?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Nick Carter, from New York? Is that right?"

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. Nick Carter from New York, I've got a letter here that tells me who and what you are; and the best advice I can give you is to climb back onto that hawss and hike. Do it quick, too, for if you're within shooting-distance by the time I have counted twenty, I'll pump you full of holes. Hike, now! Hunt the skyline, and do it sudden!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE LITTLE GIANT AND THE BIG ONE.

Almost any other person in the position in which Nick Carter found himself at that moment would have obeyed the order instantly and without any sort of demur, for not only was the huge bulk of the manager of the ranch standing directly before him, with one hand resting caressingly upon the butt of the Colt .45, but grouped around him were half a dozen men of the outfit, all of whom had been picked by him and slaved for him. And among all these faces Nick could not discern one friendly countenance. The order to go was imperative, and there was not the slightest doubt that Morgan was in deadly earnest.

Nor was there any doubt that the men intended to back him up in every demand he made.

The announcement he had made to Nick Carter that he had received a letter which informed him who and what the detective was meant simply, as Nick Carter viewed it, that Morgan had received a letter from the senator, who had already heard through the chief of the secret service what the detective's position in the matter of the persecution of Paul Brennan would be.

The detective had already seen enough of the workings of the crafty mind of the senator to realize doubtless that there was very little truth contained in the letter aforesaid; but whether there was truth in it or not, it had already served the purpose for which it was intended. And more than that, it was quite apparent that Tom Morgan, the manager of the ranch, was an able and efficient tool to carry out the plots and plans of his superior.

The only friendly face among them all that Nick

Carter could see was Dick Hartly's, for they had ridden to the bunk-house together, as we know.

Nick, with one quick, although furtive glance in the direction of Hartly discovered that the cow-puncher's hand had also dropped to the butt of one of his revolvers, and that the man was ready to fight at the drop of a hat, as the saying goes.

The discussion that had just occurred between the two men was still fresh in the minds of both, and, no doubt, each thought in that instant of the plans they had made for the ensuing night, by which they intended to get at the manager's safe in the office, and to investigate the documents that were there, in the hope of finding the proof they needed to establish, not only the innocence of Paul Brennan, but to provide them with the clue they desired in the search for Dallas.

These words of explanation, while they have taken up considerable space, and while many of the thoughts recorded here flashed through the mind of the detective, occupied apparently no time at all as related to the incident that was taking place.

Nick, as he dismounted, still remained close beside his horse, with one hand upon the saddle, and realizing when he looked into the faces of the determined men around him, and particularly into the ugly and forbidding countenance of Morgan, the manager, that if he defied the man who ordered him to leave the ranch he would surely be inviting death.

The detective saw by the gleam in Morgan's eyes that he would not hesitate to shoot, and that he knew how to rely upon the testimony of the men who were backing him to get him out of any trouble that might ensue from such an act.

Nick would greatly have liked an opportunity to say a word or two to Dick Hartly before he took his departure; but under the circumstances he deemed it wiser not even to glance at the man, for he feared now lest even the chance that they had ridden up to the bunk-house together might suggest to Morgan a suspicion that there was collusion between them.

There was, therefore, an instant of hesitation on the part of Nick Carter before he undertook to obey the peremptory command of the manager to "get back on his hawss and hike."

The delay might have been counted by instants instead of by seconds, but it was, nevertheless, long enough for Morgan to pull his weapon from its holster. And although he did not raise it, the gesture was full of meaning and significance.

Under circumstances such as that one was, the smallest and apparently the most trivial things are often full of meaning.

Had Morgan remained apparently still in the attitude he first assumed, with the cold sneer on his face and with his hand resting idly upon the butt of his gun where it was, Nick Carter would have leaped back into the saddle instantly, have turned his back, and ridden away as he was commanded to do.

But the very fact that the manager chose to emphasize his command by an additional gesture indicated to the observing eyes of Nick Carter the yellow streak which is said to lie dormant in the organism of many men.

The gesture of withdrawing the gun from its holster told Nick Carter as plainly as words could have done that Morgan was not quite so sure of his men as he appeared to be, and he would not actually shoot unless the detective should commit some act which might be construed into a real excuse for doing so.

Not more than five feet of distance separated Nick Carter from the manager as they stood facing each other, Nick with his left hand resting upon the pommel of his saddle, with the reins still in its grasp, while his right arm hung idly beside him, and Morgan, tall and built like a giant, facing him, frowningly and with the naked weapon in the grasp of his right hand.

Nick made one motion as if to remount, but as he did so he remarked coolly and calmly:

"It seems to me, Morgan, that you're driving me off without giving me a chance to say a word."

"You hike!" was the uncompromising response; and with it the manager raised his right arm so that the weapon he held in that hand frowned upon the detective.

It was an opportunity which Nick Carter could not let escape him. The temptation to take advantage of it was too strong, and he did not believe that any of the men grouped behind Morgan would dare to shoot unless the manager first took the initiative.

When Morgan raised the gun it was still with that ambiguous gesture which Nick had noticed when the man drew it from its holster; that is, it was not done with the determined air of one who intends to use it instantly unless one is obeyed.

The muzzle of it as he raised it and pointed it at the detective was not much more than two feet distant from him, and then it was that Nick Carter performed one of those lightninglike acts of his for which he has long been famous.

To have moved either hand at that instant would

have meant death to him, or, at least, a severe wound, for Morgan would have unquestionably pulled the trigger had he done so.

But he did not.

His position as he stood there must be remembered by the reader. He stood easily upon his feet, and now, at the instant when Morgan raised his gun, Nick Carter's right foot shot upward with a movement as quick as the tongue of a toad. The toe of the cowboy boot he wore came into sharp and sudden contact with Morgan's wrist, with the result that the gun he had raised so threateningly was seen hurtling through the air over the heads of the other men.

And then things happened very quickly, indeed.

The instant Nick Carter kicked with his foot, his entire muscular body, acting with the precision and swiftness of a steel spring, was launched forward, and a blow from the detective's fist caught the giant manager on the point of the chin, tilting his head suddenly backward and throwing him off his balance so that he would have fallen to the ground had not the other hand of the detective seized him by the neckerchief that was tied around his throat and jerked him forward at the same instant.

Morgan was considerably over six feet tall, and his weight was in proportion to his size, but, nevertheless, Nick Carter seized him, lifted him from his feet, and, giving him a muscular twist known as the cartwheel, to which the detective applied one of the movements of jiu-jutsu, sent him whirling backward among the six men who stood at a little distance behind him.

The detective, of course, released his hold upon the manager the instant he threw him from him. Then he turned, and with a bound seated himself in the saddle so that he was established there, and had drawn each of the two guns he carried with him in his disguise as a cowboy.

And so it happened that by the time Morgan touched the ground, Nick Carter had "the drop" on the whole outfit.

He knew that they would comprehend what that meant even more emphatically than he intended it to appear.

They would suppose that he would not hesitate to shoot, and, as in support of that theory, every pair of hands in that group went into the air on the instant. Nick Carter noticed with approval that, although Dick Hartly wore a broad grin of approval on his face, he nevertheless followed the example of the others, and also put up his hands as if he, too, were on the defensive.

The instant that Morgan struck the ground he began to swear; he also bounded to his feet again with wonderful agility under the circumstances, but he was too old a plainsman and had punched cattle on a ranch too many years not to realize instantly what he was up against.

"I don't think I need to tell you gazabos to keep your hands in the air till I get through talking," said the detective, with cool precision, "or that the first man who tries to take his digits down out of the sky will regret it; but I've got a little piece to speak before I mosey along."

"You won't mosey very far when you do," said Morgan, with a snap of his jaws.

"Oh, yes, I will, Morgan," replied Nick, "and I'll come back here again, too, before very long after you. And when I do come, Morgan, there'll be a bunch of trouble brewing for you. These men here who are backing you up in the way you're treating me know mighty little about the boss they're working under. Maybe if they knew a little more about you, Morgan, they wouldn't be quite so brash with their scowls as they have been during this little scene."

He let his eyes roam for a moment from the faces of the group before him, and then he added, as if he were addressing no one in particular, but well knowing that the words would convey a distinct meaning to Dick Hartly:

"Whatever I have said to any one of you men since I have been such a mighty welcome guest of the Eighty-three outfit, goes. If I have made any appointments with any of you, and I seem to recollect that I just now made one with Morgan, you can bet your life I'll keep them at the time and at the place."

For a moment he switched his eyes to Morgan's and stared at him, and then, with a word of meaning to the horse he rode, and with a gentle touch upon the reins with his left hand, he forced the animal to walk directly backward, and in that manner, with his gun still leveled at Morgan, so that he would not venture to take a snap-shot at him, he backed the horse to a sufficient distance so that he was out of range, and then, with a quick motion, wheeled him about and galloped away across the plains.

CHAPTER X.

WHERE BRENNAN WAS FOUND.

The detective, as he rode away from the ranch-house, felt a great disappointment that the incident

just related had happened just as it did. It came at the wrong time for his plans, for he had believed greatly in the possibilities of what he and Hartly were to attempt to do that night.

Still, there was the possibility that it might yet be accomplished.

Those last words he had uttered before he backed his horse away from the scene in such a dramatic manner had been addressed to Hartly, and Nick had no doubt that the man understood him perfectly.

Nick had said to him in effect, although the others who heard his words could not understand them, that he would keep the appointment already made for midnight, and would meet him at the entrance to the big corral, preparatory to making an attempt upon the safe of the manager, where it was supposed the papers were kept which would reveal the entire plot against Paul Brennan.

Just now the thing that puzzled the detective most was the question as to whether he would be able to get back to the required place in time to keep the appointment.

He would have to ride far and fast in order to do so, for those he had just left behind him would not fail to keep watch to see if he actually went away; and in order to convince them that he did so, he would have to keep riding on as long as there was any possibility that any man connected with the outfit could observe him.

And after that he would have to ride back again.

He must time himself so that he could arrive at the corral very near the appointed hour, for otherwise Hartly would think he was not coming.

He had ridden on in that manner until he believed he had covered at least twelve or fourteen miles, when he came upon the ruin of a hut that had been built of volcanic rocks and stones gathered from among the foothills that began half a mile farther on; for the ranch was situated quite near the Colorado line, and well to the westward in New Mexico.

It was a ruin because one of the walls, the southern one, had almost entirely fallen away, and part of the roof was gone; nevertheless, it suggested a place of temporary shelter for the detective, and he pulled up when near to it and dismounted.

His idea was that he could lead his horse inside, after letting it browse the grass for a while, and that he could rest there, and at the same time keep out of sight until it was time for him to take the back trail for the keeping of his appointment with Hartly.

He threw the bridle-rein over his horse's head to the ground, and leaving the animal there, strode forward to the hut.

Just as he was about to pass in at the door he stopped suddenly, and his hand flew quickly to the butt of one of his weapons.

He had heard a sound proceeding from inside the hut which told him instantly that it was already inhabited.

"Strange," he thought, "that whoever is there did not hear me approaching, and did not come to the door."

He waited a moment, listening intently; but then, as he heard no further sound, he advanced again, this time noiselessly, and presently peered in through the doorless aperture—for the door itself had long since disappeared, doubtless utilized for firewood at some time in the past.

Then he uttered an exclamation of surprise and started forward quickly, passing inside.

For what he had seen was the huddled heap of a man, lying evidently in the position where he had fallen from exhaustion, or from some other cause; and just as Nick Carter looked in at the door the body stirred again and uttered another moan; such a one as the detective had overheard when he first approached the hut.

The detective reached the man's side with one bound, and bent over him.

He was alive; Nick knew that already; but he was scarcely more than that.

There was hardly enough breath passing his drawn white lips to keep life in him, and the detective was amazed when he looked down upon the poor fellow to discover that life could still exist in such a worn and wasted semblance of a man.

The face was haggard and drawn, where it could be seen through the dirt that covered it, the more than a week's growth of beard that was upon it, and among the scratches and dried blood-stains.

The man's clothing was torn and soiled, as if he had dragged himself a considerable distance along the ground; and, indeed, the blood upon his face was from wounds on his hands, made in crawling over the ground, and deposited on his face when he tried to wipe the dust from his eyes.

A shock of unkempt hair, begrimed with dust, hung into his eyes; his lips were parted in a hideous grin; and yet even as the detective looked down upon the poor chap he believed he had found all that remained of Paul Brennan.

It was more the quality of intuition that told him this than recognition, for there was nothing left about the appearance of the man to compare with the description of him that had been given the detective.

Still, in that first glance Nick had not a doubt that he had found Brennan.

As he bent more closely over the man and listened to three half-muttered, half-whispered words he uttered through his swollen lips, he was convinced of it, for the words he caught were: "Dallas; little Dal!"

That was all, but it was also enough.

The man was unquestionably the father of little Dallas, the boy who was Nick Carter's client without knowing it; and in that instant Nick blessed the events which had driven him so summarily away from the ranch.

Had it not been for the letter received by Morgan, and its results, Nick must have remained on at the bunk-house, and Paul Brennan would have died alone and miserably.

Indeed, when Nick examined the man more closely, it seemed likely enough that he would do so, anyway, for he was scarcely breathing; and then, as he bent still nearer over Brennan, he made a discovery which caused him to start to his feet with a cry of amazement.

The man was wounded. He had been shot.

Brennan's shirt had been torn from his body and a rough bandage manufactured out of it, as if he had done it himself, in an effort to staunch the flow of blood from the wound he had received; and after that it would seem that he had made a valiant effort to get to the ranch-house of Eighty-three, but had only succeeded in dragging himself this far before he had succumbed to weakness and hunger.

Fortunately, Nick's saddle-bags were well provided with necessaries, and having first poured a little water from his canteen between the lips of the wounded man, he next gave him brandy mixed with water, and so, after a time which seemed very long, indeed, the man opened his eyes.

But they were glazed and without reason. He looked at Nick without seeing him. He moved his head from side to side with a weaving motion, muttering half-intelligible words as he did so; but Nick caught enough of them to give him some sort of explanation of the present circumstance.

"Shot me," muttered Brennan. "Don't know why . . . .thought he was . . . . friend . . . .Morgan, you . . . . ought not to . . . . have shot me . . . . I was . . . . your friend. . . . All right, Dallas . . . .all right. . . . Oh, Genie, my wife . . . . come back to me . . . .Genie, girl!" And so it went on continuously. Just muttered and disjointed words, sometimes conveying meaning, but more often not any at all.

But among them Nick gathered much information.

He listened on and on for a long time, all the while ministering to the man, although he did not dare to attempt to redress the wound, or to disturb it in any way. It had ceased to bleed, and he did not want to start it again until more assistance and better facilities for caring for the wounded man were at hand.

But from what he did hear he could understand much.

From the words and phrases and exclamations used by Brennan as he tossed from side to side, administered to by the detective, it appeared that he had been on his way from Durange, Colorado, to Eighty-three, when he met Morgan alone on the plain and was treacherously shot down, when he had least expected it, and when he had looked for friendliness; that he had come to his senses with the stars shining down upon him; that he was alone, where he had evidently been left for dead, possibly with the belief that the coyotes would destroy all traces of him, or, at least, of the fact that he had been shot; that he had managed to stagger on toward the ranch for a considerable distance after dressing his wound as best he could; that he had been determined to get there if he could; that he had remembered the stone hut and had crawled to it.

That was about all; but it was pitiful enough. A man with a less hardy constitution would have succumbed long ago to the suffering he had passed through.

Fortunately, Nick was able to find fresh water not far from the hut; indeed, that fact had been the original cause for the presence there of the hut.

But the water was a godsend to the wounded man, for with it Nick cleansed and revived him so that he presently opened his eyes in a sort of half-consciousness which seemed to tell him that he was at last under hands that were caring for him; and so he presently sank into a restful sleep.

Then the detective started to his feet again, for he realized that if Brennan was to live, something must be done for him without delay.

No matter what the cost, Nick felt that he must ride back to the ranch, run the risk of being greeted with bullets, and somehow convince the men that a wounded man who was an old comrade of theirs needed their help.

With another glance toward Brennan, and satisfied that he would sleep on for some time to come, Nick returned to his own horse and mounted; and in a moment more he was galloping back toward the ranch with all the speed he could get out of the cayuse.

There was grim determination in the set of the detective's jaws as he hurried forward, for he knew that he would meet with no gentle reception at the hands of Morgan and his men, when he should show up there once more.

Night had fallen and the stars were out, and Nick had proceeded two or three miles, when he suddenly pulled his horse to a stand and sat still in the saddle, listening.

He could hear the hoofbeats of horses approaching him, and he smiled grimly to himself when the thought came to him that Morgan was pursuing him already, probably with one or two of his men, intending to serve him as he had served Brennan; to shoot him and leave him to die and be devoured by the coyotes and wolves.

Then as the approaching horsemen topped a rise of ground some distance in advance of him, he saw that there were two—and there was never a time in Nick Carter's life when he would turn aside for two men.

He leaped to the ground, and commanded his horse to lie down; and then he dropped beside him, so that in the darkness the animal looked as if it might be a stray steer.

But as the two horsemen approached nearer, and when they were within easy hailing-distance, the detective suddenly called out to them:

"Halt, there! Hands up!"

They obeyed him instantly. A command like that one, and given in that tone, calls for instant obedience in that country. But although his voice had been sharp and quick, it had been recognized by one of the riders, and Nick was overjoyed to hear Hartly's voice reply to him:

"Carter, by all that's lucky!"

"You, Hartly?" called Nick, in reply.

"You bet!" was the quick response, and in another instant they were shaking hands as if they had not met for months.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONTENTS OF THE SAFE.

"Who is this man with you, Hartly?" asked Nick, for he did not remember to have seen one friendly face among that group that had surrounded him in front of the bunk-house before his departure, after he had so deftly turned the tables on Morgan.

"He is an old partner uh mine, Carter," was the quick reply. "He rode in a little while after you had gone, and it didn't take me long to make him acquainted with the layout that Morgan had handed out to you. Then, knowing that I could trust him, I told him everything that you had told me; and the result is that here he is, and he is with us until the last call for breakfast. Con Meyer, shake hands with Nick Carter."

"Hello, Nick," was the slowly drawled reply. "I reckon I'm right glad to meet up with you all, since what Dickie has told me."

"Was you ridin' back to keep the date with me, Carter?" asked Hartly.

"Partly that, and partly for another reason, Hartly," replied the detective; and then, in as few and as simple words as possible, he related what he had found at the hut.

We need not recount the expressions of surprise and other emotions with which the two men heard what Nick had to tell them; but when he finished he said:

"Now, Hartly, you two fellows know a lot more about this neighborhood than I do. Is there any place near here where we can get assistance for Brennan?"

"No; not nearer than the ranch."

"Well, we can't take him there. He would die on the way, or it would be just as bad, likely enough, after we got him there. Where is the next nearest place to go to after help?"

"There is a Navajo village—a small one—twenty miles or less to the west of here."

"An Indian village isn't of much account," said Nick; "but if it is the best that offers, why——"

"I think he would get good care there, Carter. They have got a medicine-man who has had some education at one of the Indian schools, and who knows something. Besides, there is an old squaw there who is a crackey-cooler of a nurse, if anybody should ask you. She nursed me once, and she would take good care of Brenny."

"That settles it, then," replied the detective. "Now, if you two will take orders from me for a little while, I'll tell you what I think it best to do."

"Go ahead, Nick," said Meyer. "I reckon we'll take orders from you, all right."

"Very well, then. You, Meyer, go to the stone hut—do you know where it is?"

"Sure thing."

"Go there and stand guard over poor Brennan. You'll find brandy and water and a little food there, if you should need it. You, Hartly, make tracks for that Indian village as fast as your cayuse can get you there. Bring the medicine-man and three or four others back with you; bring a stretcher of some kind, too, and take Brennan back to that village as fast as you can. That's all. Go, now."

"What are *you* going to do, Carter?" It was Hartly who asked the question.

"I am going to Eighty-three," was the quiet reply.

"What are you going to do there?"

"I am going to get at that safe if it is possible."

"You will be more likely to get a bullet into you."

"That is a chance I have got to take. How did you two fellows get away from there without being seen?"

"We didn't. We resigned. Morgan and I had some words, and I called for my time. Then Con did the same, and we rode out together."

"They are not likely to be looking for you back again, then."

"No."

"What was said about me after I left there?"

"Mighty little. The way you handled Morgan rather astonished the bunch. Morgan swore steady for about an hour afterward, but he quieted down after that. He was for taking your trail, but the others talked him out of that."

"You don't think they expect I will return there, do you?"

"Oh, they expect you back, all right, but not for two or three days, at least. They don't believe that you will venture back there alone, if that is what you mean."

"It is."

"Well, then, they ain't looking for you."

"That settles it, then. I'm off. Tell me how to head for that Indian village, when I leave the ranch. I won't want to come back here, because, I don't want to lead them this way."

Hartly studied the stars for a moment; then he replied:

"If, when you leave the ranch, you can do it before the big dipper is out uh sight, head about for the tail star of it; see?"

"Yes."

"That will bring you out somewhere close to the village, as near as I can reckon it; and I will have the reds on the watch for you."

"All right," said Nick. "It is understood, then.

As soon as I have accomplished what I intend to do at the ranch, I will make at once for the Indian village, with the expectation of finding you there, or, at least, with the knowledge that the Indians will be expecting me. If I am fortunate enough to secure the papers I go in search of, we can consider our work pretty nearly done, now that Brennan is found. And by the way, Hartly, tell that medicine-man that, if he saves Paul Brennan's life and makes him well again, he shall have more beads and blankets and ponies than he has ever owned before in all his life."

"Good!" exclaimed Hartly, slapping his thigh resoundingly. "That's the best kind of pay you can offer him."

Without another word, the detective started his horse forward through the starlight at a rapid gallop, and inasmuch as the animal had had a long rest while at the stone hut when the detective was caring for the wounded Brennan, Nick did not have to check him once during the ride back to the ranch.

Right here it should be explained that only one wing of the big ranch-house was occupied at the time; and that wing was devoted to the uses of Morgan and his family; the rest of the house having remained unoccupied since the time when the senator transferred all his holdings to the control of the cattle company of which he was the head.

When the detective approached the buildings he leaped from the saddle and led his horse quietly forward, keeping one hand over the soft muzzle of the beast, to prevent his neighing and thus announcing his approach.

As he approached nearer he studied his surroundings carefully, and finally led his horse up to the rear of the house, where, by merely unbuckling one side of the bridle-rein, he tied it at a convenient spot where he could readily and quickly find the animal when he should need it most.

After that he approached the house cautiously, for he already knew in what part of that wing the office he intended to enter was located.

There were shutters over the windows, but there were creaks through them, and Nick discovered that a light was burning in the office.

Creeping forward with great caution, he secured a position from which he could peer into the room, and he was rather surprised and not greatly pleased to discover that Tom Morgan was there on his knees before the open door of a small iron safe, from which he had already removed several packages.

Even as Nick looked it upon this scene, Morgan got up from his knees and removed his coat, at the same time making a gesture which signified that the room was uncomfortably warm; and, indeed, at that season of the year it was not surprising that it was so, with every aperture tightly closed and a duplex burner lamp radiating its heat in every direction.

Morgan hesitated for a moment, then strode to the very window at which Nick Carter was standing, threw open the sash, and pushed the shutters widely ajar. Evidently he had no thought of being disturbed or even discovered at his occupation.

Without even so much as a glance outside, he returned to the safe again, and resumed his former position on his knees before it, with his back toward the window beyond. Nick Carter had again risen into full view, had Morgan but turned his eyes in that direction.

Things could not have happened better for Nick's purposes.

He waited a moment, until Morgan was again absorbed in his occupation, and then, having placed his hand upon the sill of the window, the detective made a light and a quick spring through it, landing on his feet inside the room with scarcely any noise at all, but necessarily with a jar, so startling Morgan into springing erect and turning to face the man who had intruded upon him.

But already Nick Carter had the man covered with his weapon, and now he said clearly to him:

"I have returned, Morgan, as you observe, and I'm not in a mood to be fooled with, or to waste my time in fooling with you. Out there on the plain I found the ruins of a stone hut, and inside that hut I discovered a wounded and dying man; but he will not die. His name is Paul Brennan. You shot him down, Morgan, ruthlessly and treacherously, and you've got to answer for it."

Still keeping his weapon pointed at Morgan's heart, he removed a pair of handcuffs from the left side pocket of his coat, and then he said:

"These things will lock when they're snapped together. I'm going to toss them to you, and I want you to catch them. When you have them I want you to snap them on your wrists, and you can guess what will happen to you if you don't do exactly as I tell you. Now catch them!"

It is unnecessary to state in detail every motion that Nick Carter compelled the ranch manager to make after that, but the result of it all was that the man was presently securely handcuffed, and the detective had relieved him of his weapons, so that he was rendered not only harmless, but helpless.

It was then that Nick Carter gave his attention to the objects on the floor in front of the safe, and almost the first thing he discovered was a package of letters still in the envelopes upon which were the plainly printed words: "Senate Chamber of the United States of America."

Nick Carter knew then that the package contained the letters he sought, and he secured it, dropping it into one of his pockets.

Among the other packages was the bundle of money that Hartly had described to him as having been found in a concealed place in the adobe house formerly occupied by Paul Brennan; and beside it was the weighty square package neatly wrapped in brown paper which the detective knew must contain the counterfeit plate which had also been concealed there.

Possessing himself of these, he still made a further

search of the articles taken from the safe, and found another package of letters addressed in a woman's hand to Paul Brennan at Ranch Eighty-three, and he knew without examining them that they must be letters written by Brennan's wife to him which he had never been permitted to receive.

Having examined everything with that thoroughness which was always Nick Carter's trait, and deciding that there was nothing else that was of value to him or to Brennan, he ordered Morgan to precede him through the window; and so they climbed out into the night, leaving the lamp still burning upon the table in that office room.

But Nick Carter had first possessed himself of a lariat which hung upon a peg in a coil inside the office, and with this, as soon as they were outside the house, he bound Morgan to one of the trees in the grove, and, having gagged him so that he could not call for help, the detective hurried toward the corral, to secure another horse for the accommodation of his prisoner.

And so it happened that in rather less than an hour from the moment he first peered through the shutters upon Morgan at his work before the safe, Nick Carter rode away from the ranch-house toward the Indian village that Hartly had described, with his prisoner helplessly bound to the saddle of a led horse.

CHAPTER XII.

A REUNION ON THE PLAINS.

Before Nick Carter left Washington on his trip to the West he wrote and sent a letter to the senator's daughter in which he explained to her that he had left Patsy there to keep watch of her father's movements, in the hope that it would lead to the discovery of what had become of the child Dallas. In addition to that, he gave another letter to her, into the hand of Patsy, to deliver in person, introducing him to her, and assuring her that she could trust the assistant as implicitly as she might himself.

But when he did those two things he did not anticipate what would be the result of them.

The letter he wrote and sent to Gene, following so closely upon the talk she had had with the detective in person, imbued her with new courage, and she waited with impatience the coming of Patsy.

Fortunately for her contentment of mind, she had not long to wait, for Patsy, following out his chief's directions, and realizing that he could keep much better watch over the senator if he had an entrée to the house, lost no time in presenting himself there.

Gene received him the moment his card was taken to her; and without giving him time to explain, told him that she knew all about everything; and she added:

"My boy is not here in Washington; I am assured of that. He is out there, near the ranch. My father would not bring him here; he would leave him there. And, besides, Mr. Garvan, my husband is there, also. I know it. He would go back there, and if he did that he would be in constant danger. There would not be a moment—there will never be a moment until I am actually with my husband again—when he will not be in danger of his life, because of the plots against him. I wish to go to him at once. I want you to take me there, following as closely upon the trail of Mr. Carter as it can be done. Will you take me?"

Patsy hesitated. There was nothing in the orders Nick had given him which provided for this contingency; but, nevertheless, it had always been Nick Carter's method with his assistants to allow them certain discretionary powers.

Something, an intuition, perhaps, told him that the suggestion made by the girl wife was the very best thing that could be done, and so, after only a slight moment of hesitation, he replied:

"Yes. I will take you there. How soon can you be ready?"

"Wait," she said, in reply; and she hurried from the room.

Within ten minutes she was back again with a small satchel in her grasp, and this Patsy took from her as they left the house, and presently boarded a car for the railway-station.

Thus it happened that in rather less than twenty-four hours after the departure of Nick Carter from Washington for the West, Paul Brennan's wife, accompanied by Patsy, was also on her way back to the New Mexico ranch where she had been made so happy and also so miserable.

When they arrived at the railway-station nearest to the ranch it was already night, and under ordinary circumstances it would have been policy to have waited there till morning before taking the trail; but Gene was much too impatient to wait; and, if the truth be told, Patsy was also eager to get on.

The result of it was that within an hour after they left the train at the station they were mounted on horses side by side, and had set out across the plain for Eighty-three. They needed no guide, since Gene was perfectly familiar with the trail, and so they dashed onward through the starlight; and the night, as the reader has already surmised, was the same one on which Nick Carter found Paul Brennan wounded and nearly dead in the stone hut but half a mile off the main trail.

But neither of the travelers was aware of this.

Their objective point was the ranch house, where Patsy expected they would find Nick; and where Gene believed she would find her husband; or, if she did not discover him there, she knew that she would find loyal friends among the cowboys of the outfit.

The night deepened as they advanced, and they had accomplished about half of the journey when Gene suddenly cried out, at the same time pointing across the plain toward a group of dark forms that were moving slowly at right angles in their own direction.

She spurred her horse forward at the same instant, and was rather amazed, as was Patsy, who had followed her closely, to see the dark forms form in line in front of something they had been carrying, and to hear a sharp voice order them to halt.

But it never occurred to Gene to halt. Her intuition told her what it was thus laid out upon the litter the men had been carrying so tenderly; and before anybody could offer to obstruct her approach, for they saw it was a woman, she had reached it and was on her knees beside her husband, while around her there was grouped silently the forms of half a dozen Indians, and towering over them the tall figures of Dick Hartly and Con Meyer.

But Gene was at once unconscious of the presence of any one there save her dearly loved husband; and as she dropped on her knees beside him and called his name, covering his face with kisses as she did so, he opened his eyes to consciousness for the first time.

"Is it real?" he murmured. "Is it you, Genie."

"Yes, Paul, it is I," she breathed into his ear. "I have come back to you, never to leave you again—if you will take me. Will you take me, Paul? Will you?"

It is not necessary to repeat what he said then, nor to tell how strangely and quickly strength seemed to be given to him. For the moment neither had thought of their boy, in the excess of joy over their own meeting, but now when they would have asked each other about Dallas, Dick Hartly thrust his tall figure forward.

"Miss Genie," he said, still giving her the old name as she had been known on the ranch. "This is the happiest moment of my life, bar none. I don't know where you dropped from, nor how you got here, and I don't care, as long as you're here. Heaven bless you! And Paul, old-timer, if you've woke up so's you can hear the news, I jest wanta tell you that the kid is found, all right, all right. He's over at the Navajo village, where we're going now. And he's had good care, too. There ain't nothin' the matter with him. Chief Sinverguenza was told that you wanted him kept there, and he thought he was doing the right thing; and now I reckon that we'll mosey right along there, instead of headin' for the ranch. It ain't very healthy around old Eighty-three for us, just now."

What more he might have said at that moment does not appear, for from across the plain there came at that moment another shout, and a moment later Nick Carter rode in among them with his prisoner. The big dipper in the sky had changed its position since Hartly suggested it as a guide for the detective to follow, and he had borne very much to the right of the course he would otherwise have taken; but the result of it was that he came upon the main party at just the right time.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, when he saw who was there. "I did not expect to find you here, Mrs. Brennan, but it is a blessing that you are. I think your husband will get well very quickly, with you to nurse him back to life."

"Yes," whispered Brennan, with joy shining in his face; "and with little Dal to play around us while she's doing it."

And so the march was presently taken up again toward the Indian village; but it was a happy party that hastened with all the speed they dared use toward the place where the boy was awaiting them.

However, all the party did not go in that direction. Nick Carter turned his captive over to the care of Hartly and Meyer, and directed them to take the manager to Largo.

"I stopped there long enough to make the acquaintance of the sheriff when I came through the place," he told them. "You take Morgan to him. Tell the sheriff that Nick Carter sent him, and that he is charged with attempted murder. Tell him all about it, and say that I will ride over there day after tomorrow. Then we will see what is to be done with him."

At the Navajo Indian village Paul Brennan was made as comfortable as he could have been in a house; and with his wife to minister to his wants, and with his boy to play around him and to jabber all sorts of welcoming and loving words to him, there was every prospect of his speedy recovery.

The following morning after their arrival, when Nick Carter took the little fellow on his knee, he said to Dallas:

"Do you realize, young man, that you are the youngest client Nick Carter ever had?"

"Ain't I the bestest, too?" was the assured rejoinder.

"I think you are, Dallas," replied the detective. "Anyhow, I am mighty glad that I accepted your case."

"And I have got my mama again, ain't I, Mister Carter?"

"Yes, indeed."

"And my papa, too?"

"Yes."

"And some day my mama says I'll have my grandpapa, too."

"Of course you will, Dallas. I shall make it my especial duty to go to him with this little story; and if he is the man I think he is he will know when he is well beaten, and will give you all a hearty welcome."

And it should be said here and now that Nick Carter did go to the senator, and that by the time Paul Brennan had recovered sufficiently to travel, he and his wife and child were summoned to Washington.

THE END.

The next number—614—will contain "The Madness of Morgan; or, Nick Carter to the Rescue."

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A STRUGGLE IN THE DARK.

By ROGER STARBUCK.

A heavy gale was blowing from the southwest, furiously tossing the broad waters of the Pacific, and driving the foam in misty flakes over the crests of the roaring waves.

The moon, occasionally emerging from behind the clouds rolling in torn masses over the sky, would for a moment light the vast wilderness of ocean, revealing the summits of the towering seas and faintly lighting the watery caverns between.

Our ship—the *St. Mark*—rolled heavily as she boomed upon her way under close-reefed topsails and topmaststaysail. Fore and aft her timbers groaned like dying men, while her three tall masts, jerking and straining, seemed on the point of going by the board.

Crouching behind the windlass to escape a drenching sea, that suddenly burst over the weather bulwarks, I found myself by the side of Achok—a tall, supple native, with shoulders and breast as broad as those of a lion, and long, flexible arms, the latter of which did me good service on the present occasion; for had not their owner thrown them around my body I should certainly have been swept overboard.

"A thousand thanks!" I gratefully exclaimed, when the danger was past. "You have saved my life!"

"Yes," answered the Malay—for such he was—"me have saved your life, but me quick take him if you no promise not to say anything of the man whose head me been break with cooper's hammer!"

"What?" I gasped, staring upon him with amazement. "What do you mean? You are raving!"

The eyes of the native flashed like those of a serpent. I could see his white teeth gleaming in the darkness like a [illegible]

"You no can see? Me mean [illegible]ly; but it struck me when me brought [illegible] me only make sure: so we will no say any more about it."

He clutched my arm as he spoke, and peering into my face with his black eyes, probably read there the sudden suspicion which his singular manner had really excited in my mind.

"Ah!" he almost shrieked, clutching me by the throat. "Promise—promise you no say a word about de murder and me let you go. If not, I serve you de same way, and then throw you overboard, too!"

"Achok," I calmly answered, pushing his hand from my throat, "you know me too well to hope to get a promise from me by means of a threat. I knew nothing, and now only have your words for it, of your having killed your enemy, the Kanaka, and——"

"Ah! how you know who, if you not see me do it? How you know it was the Kanaka that me kill?"

"I conclude so from the fact of your having fought with him yesterday in the forecastle and his having beat——"

"He never beat me s'pose my foot not have slipped!" interrupted Achok, grinding his teeth. "He strike me many times while me down; and me swear me take his life. Well, now so much having been said, me may as well say all. Me have taken his life. Me struck him down with cooper's hammer and throw his body overboard, just before you come behind the windlass."

"I thought I heard a groan as I came forward," I answered; "but I supposed I might have been mistaken. This is horrible, Achok, perfectly horrible; and I——"

"Promise! Promise you!" he interrupted, impatiently. "Me have saved your life, and so you should be willing not to get me hanged."

Before I could reply, however, he seemed to have concluded to act according to the adage that "dead men tell no tales," for he again grasped me by the throat, and, raising his knife, would certainly have plunged it into my bosom, if I had not knocked it from his grasp by a heavy blow upon his wrist.

A desperate struggle now ensued between us, and, as he was the stronger party, he soon contrived to hurl me upon my back. Putting both knees upon my breast, he clasped my throat with his skinny hands, and I believed my doom was sealed. The horrible pains of suffocation were beginning to reach my throat and brain, when a sudden roll of the ship caused my tormentor to fall upon his side. With a powerful exertion, I contrived to loosen myself from his clasp, and I then sprang to my feet.

Quick as lightning his arms were now thrown around me from behind, and, in spite of all resistance on my part, I was borne to the lee bulwarks. With his wonderful strength he lifted me as I might have lifted a child, and to my horror I found myself suspended over the boiling, foaming caldron of water that raged alongside of the careening ship. I shouted for help, but my shipmates, unfortunately, were in the after part of the vessel, and could not hear my voice above the din of the storm.

"Now, then," yelled the native, "away you go—cursed white man! 'Dead men no tell tales!'"

He let go of me as he spoke, but I clutched at a rope that hung over the bulwarks, and, notwithstanding his efforts to shake me from it, I clung to it with a tenacity natural under the circumstances.

The Malay fairly screamed with rage and suddenly I saw a clasp-knife gleaming in his hand. He raised it above the rope, and my heart sank within me. I could not mistake his fiendish intention of cutting the strands.

"I will die like a man!" I muttered; "and may God take care of my wife and children!"

But, even as I spoke, the ship rolled her bulwarks under; and the Malay, who had incautiously leaned over them while holding his knife suspended, fell headlong into the dark, stormy waters, and was carried, shrieking, far away from the ship, to leeward.

Seizing the rail, I regained the deck, and, hastening aft, I related my story to my shipmates, whose astonishment may

be imagined, and who united in congratulating me upon my escape.

"I never liked the looks of that Malay," said an old tar; "and though I ain't in the habit of speaking disrespectfully of the dead, it's my opinion that the chap has met with his just deserts for murdering the Kanaka."

KNOWN ONLY BY HIS COINS.

There are many coins which have a romantic interest for the collector on account of their historical associations, and yet others which have an equal interest because little if anything can be learned of their origin. To the latter class belong the coins issued by Templeton Reid, assayer, who struck gold pieces of various denominations at his private minting establishment near the gold mines in Lumpkin County, Georgia, in 1830.

While the denominations of these coins and their designs are definitely known, next to nothing has ever been learned about Templeton Reid. All that is known is that in 1830, when the gold mines of Georgia were furnishing a not inconsiderable proportion of the gold production of the United States, he conducted an assaying and smelting establishment at which gold coins of the denominations of $2.50, $5 and $10 were struck.

If calculations were based upon the number of Reid's coins in existence it would seem that the number of pieces issued by him must have been comparatively small, but the very fact that he conducted a coining plant for four years is evidence that a fairly large number of coins must have been struck by him, and it is not improbable that stray specimens of these may still be preserved as souvenirs in the South.

Scarcest of the Reid coins is the ten-dollar piece dated 1830. On the obverse it bears the denomination and the inscription "Templeton Reid, Assayer," while the reverse shows the words "Georgia Gold," surrounded by a circle of stars. The gold pieces of this denomination struck in 1830, 1831, 1832 and 1833 weighed 248 grains, were of a fineness of .942 and had an intrinsic value of $10.06. There is one other variety of this denomination undated, but of equal rarity with the dated specimens.

The only specimen of the ten-dollar piece now known is in the mint collection at Philadelphia, where it has been preserved through the foresight of former United States Assayer Dubois, who was instrumental in organizing the collection of coins at the Philadelphia Mint.

No. 10 in rarity comes the ten-dollar piece dated 1830. The last auction sale brought $175 at one of the best sales in this city a couple of years ago. It is probable the only specimen definitely located, with the exception of one in the mint collection. The average weight of the ten-dollar pieces was 247 grains and the fineness of the gold .930, the intrinsic value being $9.9[illegible].

The third denomination, that of $2.50, showed the same designs as the five and ten-dollar pieces, it weighed 62 grains and was of a fineness of .932, with an intrinsic value of $2.43. A couple of hundred dollars would be needed now to buy one of the little gold pieces.

In 1834, when the standard of the United States gold coins was lowered in fineness from .916 2-3 to .899225, it is said that Reid lowered the fineness of the gold in his coins also, but through the change in coin values no corresponding change in value than there was previously. The coins of the coins struck before that date contained the same gold that as it came from the mines, for the Georgia gold was much purer than that produced in other parts of the United States.

After he ceased coining in 1834, nothing more is heard of Reid until 1849, when it is supposed that he removed his coining machinery and tools to California, where gold had just been discovered. There he struck gold coins of the denomination of ten and twenty-five dollars.

The California issues of Templeton Reid now exceed those of his Georgia mint in point of rarity. So far as is known there is in existence but a single specimen of each denomination, and these, like the earlier issues of Reid's Georgia mint, owe their preservation to Mr. Dubois.

From appearances the coins were struck from California gold without artificial alloy, and the value of the ten and the twenty-five-dollar piece was respectively about $9.75 and $24.50. The ten-dollar piece differed greatly in design from any of the coins issued by other private establishments. On the obverse around the extreme edge are three concentric lines close together. In the centre of a wide open field is the date, "1849," and around the border, just inside the circles, is inscribed "Templeton Reid, Assayer." On the reverse in the center of the field, enclosed in three lines similar to those on the obverse, are the words: "Ten Dollars," and around the inner edge of the circles "California" at the top, and "Gold" at the bottom.

The twenty-five-dollar piece was unique not only in design but also in denomination, as no other coin of an equivalent value was ever issued in this country. It shows a single line around the obverse border, inside of which is an ornamental circle similar to that on the borders of some of our present silver coins. Around this inside the circle is "Templeton Reid, Assayer." At the top is the denomination in Roman numerals, XXV., surmounted by a dollar mark, and below is the date, 1849.

The reverse has the same kind of ornamental border as the obverse, at the top being the word "California" in a curve, below which is the value, "Twenty-five." Still further below is a diamond-shaped ornament with the word "Dollars," and "Gold" at the extreme bottom.

Careful investigation in California fails to bring to light the slightest scrap of information regarding Reid. It is not known even where his plant was situated. Those who are interested in his history as connected with his coin issues would almost conclude that he never went to California, but for the existence of the two gold pieces which were struck in California gold, about which metal there are distinguishing features which positively identify it.

HOW TO MAKE A CHEAP COMPASS.

A very good compass may be easily constructed as follows: Get from a druggist a common pasteboard pill-box of about one inch and three-quarters in diameter. Cut in the lid a round hole an inch in diameter. Cover the hole on the inside with a piece of thin window-glass, which can be held in place by bits of sealing-wax at the corners. Break off about three-eighths of an inch from the point of a sewing needle, and affix it, point upward, by means of sealing-wax, to the center of the bottom of the box. This is to be the pivot upon which the magnetic needle is to swing. For a needle, use the permanent magnet made of a darning needle. To adjust this to the pivot, saw out a piece of ivory or bone —the handle of an old tooth-brush is good material—a quarter of an inch square, by a tenth of an inch thick. In the center of the square side bore a hole, by means of a knife-blade, or the handle-end of a file, nearly through the piece. The inner extremity of the hole must be smooth, with no small crevices or sharp edges. To the opposite surface attach by sealing-wax the needle, and, after placing it upon the pivot, put the cover on the box. If the hole in the ivory be well made, one end of the needle will point to the north. Place the compass near any large mass of iron, as, for example, the kitchen stove, and see where it will point then.

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